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Jihadism Transformed: Al-Qaeda and Islamic State's Global Battle of Ideas

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In the Shadow of the Islamic State

Shi'i Responses to Sunni Jihadist Narratives in a Turbulent Middle East

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines how the Arab Spring was gradually sectarianized, leading to the emergence of more rigid and puritanical sect-based identities and inter-communal conflicts across the Middle East, extending even further outside of the region and across the Muslim-majority world. Using the social movement theory concept of “framing,” it considers how various political and armed actors involved in the Syrian civil war and the conflict in Iraq, including actors such as the Iranian government, Hizbullah, Sunni and Salafi actors in the Arab Gulf states, and Sunni rebel and other militant *jihadi* organizations such as Jabhat al-Nusra/Jabhat Fath al-Sham, Islamic State, Jaysh al-Islam, and Ahrar al-Sham, have drawn on competing historical narratives and memory in combination with contemporary events to produce a thoroughly modern but also selectively “historicized” social mobilization narrative meant to encourage activism from their target audiences. The ways in which clashing historical memory and narratives are deployed in regional conflicts, which constitutes a form of re-fighting the past in the present, are analyzed. Specific historical references, such as the invocation of Shi’i legendary heroes of Karbala such as Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas, which are deployed as rhetorical weapons in geopolitical contests over power and political dominance, are also considered.

Keywords: Syrian civil war, Shi’i, Shi’ism, Sectarianism, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jihadi, Karbala, Ahrar al-Sham

Introduction: Gradual sectarianisation of the ‘Arab Spring’

The outbreak of mass protests and then civil war in Syria against the government of Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian Ba’th party during the spring of 2011 into 2012, affected a clear shift in how many Twelver Shi’i¹ political actors saw the ‘Arab Spring’, the wave of popular protests that began in Tunisia in the winter of 2010. At the beginning, as popular protests swept Tunisia’s Zayn al-‘Abidin bin ‘Ali and Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak from power, a number of the Middle East’s most prominent Shi’i Islamist parties and leaders claimed that Tunisians and Egyptians had been ‘inspired’, three decades later, by the Iranian revolution. Iran’s supreme leader, ‘Ali Khamenei, and Hasan Nasrallah, the secretary general of Lebanon’s Hizbullah, initially attempted to harness the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings as a rhetorical weapon to use in their political (p.158) competition with the United States, European countries and their regional allies such as Saudi Arabia.² This early embrace by the region’s powerful Shi’i Islamists, however, did not last. The repression of popular mass protests in Bahrain, and the rise to prominence of Salafi and anti-Shi’i Sunni political parties and armed groups across the region, led to increasingly hostile and even conspiratorial views of the Arab Spring

among Iranian officials and other Shi'i Islamists. The wave of uprisings, they said, was yet another 'Western' and 'Zionist' plot against the world's Muslims, and in particular, opponents of the US-led order in the Middle East and North Africa.

This chapter will consider how the Arab Spring was sectarianised. It will do this by considering the ways in which a sectarian frame can be used to mobilise people towards radical or even violent aims. It will then consider how the various actors involved in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq have used sectarian identities in these ways: first considering the development and variety of sectarian views within Salafi jihadist movements, and then setting out the range of counter-polemics, and mobilisation to violence, of Shi'i political actors. The chapter will then describe how particular aspects of Shi'i historical narratives have been used by militant actors in Syria and Iraq to mobilise support. Finally, the role of intra-Shi'i dynamics in armed mobilisation in Syria and Iraq will be explored.

Framing sectarianism: identities and social mobilisation

The reification of communal identities is a process of framing frequently used for social and political mobilisation by different actors. Historically, sectarian identities and divisions have been used both within a single community as well as in struggles and competitions for resources and power between different communities or sects.³ Modern sectarianism, particularly between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims, far from representing primarily 'ancient hatreds' and divisions, instead rests to a great degree on contemporary political and military conflicts. The evolution of sectarianism in Syria since 2011, and Iraq since the 2003 invasion and toppling of Saddam Hussein, has been guided by political, military and social developments on the ground. Historical divisions do, of course, play a role in the evolution of Sunni and Shi'i sectarian rhetoric and ideologies today, providing a narrative, conceptual vocabulary and frame that seeks to mobilise individuals based on an 'us vs. them' paradigm.⁴ Sectarian identities are particularly salient in environments with multiple ethnic groups or sects where there is significant competition for power and resources. (p.159) Identifiers such as religious affiliation, tribe or clan, and linguistic group become ways to differentiate between 'us and them', allowing social and political entrepreneurs to turn these identities into mobilisation frames, which draw upon cultural idioms meant to garner support and drive social mobilisation.⁵ In order for frames to mobilise their

intended audience(s) successfully, they must resonate with people's existing beliefs and identities.

The concept of 'framing', the creation of interpretive lenses through which people perceive world events and through which they develop a sense of group and self-identity, provides a useful framework for understanding the development and devolution of sectarianism in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. In order to attract new members, as well as to maintain internal solidarity among existing members and supporters, Sunni jihadist groups such as the Islamic State (formerly ISIL) and Jabhat al-Nusra and Shi'i paramilitary organisations, as well as regional governments and religious figures both inside and outside Syria and Iraq, portray the conflicts in both countries as essential to the survival of their specific groups, the Sunnis (*Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a*) or the Shi'is, who see themselves as the 'true' followers of the Prophet Muhammad's family (*Ahl al-Bayt*). The expression of these two sets of mobilisation frames and narratives play off one another, influencing the evolution of the narratives and worldviews of the other community. To achieve 'frame resonance', mobilisation frames draw on the 'toolkit' of cultural, in this case 'Islamic', symbols, idioms, beliefs and worldviews in order to achieve frame resonance and successfully portray social mobilisation and activism as a moral duty.⁶ These mobilisation frames, however, only have resonance within particular social, political and economic contexts. The severe upheaval in Syria and Iraq provided such a context. The development of sectarian narratives in each community during a conflict influences the parallel development and contours of the sectarian worldviews of other communities, which respond by constructing and deploying their own counter-narratives.

In the case of the Arab Spring, the steady devolution of the protests in Syria in the face of brutal government repression and the increasingly public participation of pro-Assad Iran, Hizbullah and Iraqi Shi'i militias have contributed to a rising level of sectarian rhetoric across the region. In Egypt, politically mobilised Salafis⁷ were able to influence the country's Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*)-controlled government during its time in power from 2011 until June 2013, challenging its religious credentials and pressing for increased implementation of a black-and-white interpretation of the shari'ah.⁸ To appeal to a Salafi and popular Islamist base, the Ikhwan government increasingly (p.160) publicly supported, or at least did not condemn, Egyptians joining various Syrian armed rebel groups, and it condemned Shi'i allies of al-Assad.⁹

The influential Qatar-based Egyptian preacher and religious jurist Yusuf al-Qaradawi¹⁰ also publicly condemned Iran, Hizbullah and other Shi'i Islamists for their support of the Syrian government.¹¹ He had previously also condemned the popular protests in Bahrain for being 'sectarian'.¹² The intervention by Arab Gulf countries led by Saudi Arabia against Bahrain's protests in March 2011, and the continued support for the island nation's al-Khalifa ruling family from the US and many European governments, despite the brutality of its crackdown—which included mass arrests, the killings of demonstrators, and torture—increased the disillusion of many Shi'is to the Arab Spring. The rise to power of Salafi political parties like Hizb al-Nur in Egypt was alarming to Shi'is, already a super minority among the world's Muslims, with the exception of Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain and Iran. The strong tradition of vitriolic and often violent anti-Shi'ism within the Salafi current of Sunni Islam was the major cause of these feelings of unease. Shi'is' worst fears came to pass in June 2013 when Hasan Shehata, Egypt's most prominent Shi'i preacher, and three other Egyptian Shi'is were lynched in the village of Zawiyat Abu Musalam near Giza by a mob after allegedly insulting historical figures revered by Sunnis.¹³ Shehata was eulogised by many Shi'i religious scholars, politicians and Iranian state-owned media outlets such as Press TV and al-'Alam, as well as by Shi'i militias in Syria and Iraq.¹⁴ These and similar events were seen as evidence of the growing existential threat to many Shi'i communities in the region.

Sunni sectarian polemic

Salafi Anti-Shi'ism and Salafi Jihadism

IS, Jabhat al-Nusra and some Syrian Islamist rebel groups such as Harakat Ahrar al-Sham (Movement of the Free-born of Syria) draw upon a repertoire of anti-Shi'i polemic, a discourse that sees Shi'i Muslims as being guilty of heretical religious innovation (*bid'a*) and polytheism (*shirk*) because of their elevation of the twelve Imams, and to a lesser extent their families, and Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter.¹⁵ Existing hostilities towards Shi'i beliefs and ritual practices, such as shrine visitation and intercessory prayer to holy figures such as the Imams (*shafa'a*), are combined with social, economic and political grievances to create a particularly potent militant Salafi (or Salafised) rhetoric and mobilisation frames that these groups use to try to convince (p.161) Sunni populations that Shi'is, in the form of Iran, the Iraqi central government, and groups such as Lebanese Hizbullah and Iraqi Shi'i armed groups and Islamist parties, pose a threat to the survival of Sunnism and Sunni communities.¹⁶ The development of a Sunni anti-Shi'ism in Syria by

groups such as the Syrian *Ikhwan*, and even mainstream Sunni religious scholars like the regime-aligned Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, has been profoundly influenced by the political alliance between the Syrian Ba'thist government and Iran, as well as suspicions regarding Iranian interests in the region, including the promotion of Shi'ism, real and imagined.¹⁷

Al-Qaeda and the Shi'is: hostile ambivalence

The al-Qaeda Senior Leadership (AQSL) approach to Shi'i beliefs and practices has been to consider them as *bid'a* if not outright *shirk*; yet they have not preached open and indiscriminate warfare against Shi'is. Al-Zawahiri and other senior AQSL leaders, including *Shaykh* 'Atiyyatullah (Ibrahim al-Mishtaywi al-Misrati) and Abu Yahya al-Libi, were opposed to the blanket targeting of Shi'is by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the founder of Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad and al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, the precursor organisations to the Islamic State (IS).¹⁸

Rather than Shi'i theology and '*aqida*, AQSL leaders more frequently condemn Shi'i actors such as Iran and Hizbullah for political actions such as failing to oppose and even cooperating with the United States in toppling the Afghan Taliban government in Kabul and invading Iraq in 2003. In a 2009 video interview produced and released by AQSL's official media department, the al-Sahab Media Foundation, al-Zawahiri asks rhetorically if a single Shi'i grand *mujtahid* has called for military resistance (*al-jihad al-'askari*) against the Americans in Iraq, and if not, why not.¹⁹ Al-Zawahiri has also ordered members of AQSL and its regional affiliates not to target Shi'is generally, but rather only those groups or segments who target 'the Sunnis' (*Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a*).²⁰ Although he refers to them as 'deviant sects' (*al-firaaq al-munharifa*), he wrote in a series of guidelines for al-Qaeda fighters that even if attacked they must restrict their response to targeting those segments from these sects that are openly belligerent and engaged in attacking Sunnis.²¹

Similarly, influential Salafi jihadist religious scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi publicly criticised al-Zarqawi's targeting of Shi'is generally in Iraq as well as his group's filming of executions, including beheadings. The complex relationship between al-Zarqawi and Maqdisi is explored in Chapter 2 in this (p.162) volume. Stung by his former teacher's criticisms, al-Zarqawi and his supporters attacked al-Maqdisi for not having actually fought jihad despite his voluminous writings supporting military action against 'apostate' (*murtad*),

tyrannical (*taghut*) regimes in the Muslim world and their Western backers.²²

The opposition of many Sunni jihadist leaders and strategists such as Osama bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri to targeting Shi'is generally is due to their concern that the mujahidin will become bogged down in sectarian, inter-communal conflict, which is trivial compared to the need to combat apostate governments in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Egypt along with their foreign backers, chief among them the United States, France, Britain, Germany, India and Israel. The internal tension within the global jihadist current has long been that between those Sunni jihadists who are more puritanical and exclusionary in their religious views and those who seek to create a global jihadist movement that is as large and inclusive as possible.²³

Two regional AQ affiliates, Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, have stronger anti-Shi'i views than AQSL. The former was founded by jihadist veterans from Iraq—including the group's leader, the Syrian Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani—who likely brought home with them more pronounced anti-Shi'i views. The 'Alawi identity of the ruling al-Assad family and extensive Iranian state support for the Syrian regime has also fuelled sectarian views, particularly of rank-and-file Jabhat al-Nusra fighters. The founding membership, including senior leaders, of the Yemen-based AQAP included a large number of Saudi Salafi jihadists, and their anti-Shi'i ideology plays a significant role in the group's war against the Yemeni Zaydi Shi'i Houthi movement and its supporters.²⁴

IS: Jihadist anti-Shi'ism at its most extreme

IS and its precursor organisations²⁵ represent the most extreme expression of Sunni jihadist anti-Shi'ism. Guided by the ideology laid down by its founder, al-Zarqawi, the group sees all Shi'is as legitimate targets and frequently carries out brazen and bloody attacks in Shi'i-majority areas of Iraq and against both Shi'i civilians and combatants.²⁶ IS leaders and ideologues such as its *amir*, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the 'caliph' Ibrahim ibn 'Awad al-Samarra'i), spokesman Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, and chief shari'ah official and *mufti* Turki al-Bin'ali,²⁷ justify their extreme anti-Shi'ism and blanket targeting of Shi'is, whether they are actively fighting the group or not, by drawing upon anti-Shi'i positions of past scholars. This includes the medieval Hanbali jurist and religious (p.163) scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), the nineteenth-century Najdi Salafi Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Abd al-Latif Al al-Shaykh (1848–1921), a descendant of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92),²⁸ whose writings are also used by the Islamic State in shaping its creedal (*'aqida*) views, the great hadith compiler and *muhaddith* al-Bukhari (d. 870), and the medieval Qur'anic exegete (*mufasssir*), historian and jurist Ibn Kathir (d. 1373).

Iraqi soldiers, police and other members of the security forces and the fighters in the armed groups founded and controlled by the country's various Shi'i Islamist parties and paramilitary groups and *'ulama* in the shrine cities are described in IS discourse in a variety of derogatory ways, each drawing upon historical sectarian polemics. The Iraqi army and Shi'i militia forces are labelled the 'Safavid Army' (*al-jaysh al-safawi*) after the Shi'i Safavid dynasty that ruled what is now modern-day Iran from 1501 to 1732, the 'fire worshippers' (*almajus*) in reference to the Zoroastrians of pre-Islamic Iran, and the 'rejectors' of true Islam (*al-Rafida* or *al-Rawafid*).²⁹ Shi'is generally are portrayed as posing a greater threat to Islam than Christians, Jews or other non-Muslims because of their claim to be Muslim, which has historically allowed them their treacherous betrayal of Sunnis and alliance with non-Muslim aggressors such as the Ilkhanid Mongols and the European Crusaders.³⁰ Modern Shi'is are compared to historical Shi'i 'villains' such as 'Abdullah ibn Saba, the seventh-century heretical 'founder' of Shi'ism in Salafi and other Sunni anti-Shi'i discourses; Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274), a famous Shi'i polymath who was patronised by the Ilkhanid ruler Hulagu following his conquest of Iraq and Iran and who is accused of encouraging the sacking of Baghdad by Mongol forces; and Ibn al-'Alqami, the chief minister (*wazir*) of the last 'Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, al-Musta'sim bi-llah, whom he is accused of betraying. In an

attack on Shi'i shrine visitation, the Islamic State also uses hadith narrated from the Prophet Muhammad by 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, commanding the destruction of raised tombs and pictures and drawings to prevent polytheism.³¹

Religious justifications are not the only dynamic to the Islamic State's anti-Shi'i rhetoric and messaging. The group also draws extensively on the deep well of Iraqi and Syrian Sunni grievances against their governments and the regional activities of Iran and Shi'i Islamist groups such as Hizbullah, chiefly their strong and continued backing of the Syrian regime. At the centre of IS public messaging is a claim to be the 'defender' of Sunnis, the only actor willing to combat Shi'i expansionism and avenge Shi'i persecution of Sunnis.³²

In connecting Shi'is in modern times to historical 'villains' such as Ibn Saba, al-Tusi and Ibn al-'Alqami, IS creates a propaganda narrative of (alleged) historical (p.164) Shi'i perfidy towards Islam and (Sunni) Muslims. The contemporary behaviour, therefore, of parties such as Hizbullah, Iraqi Da'wa party and the Iranian state is put into a 'historical' context in which Shi'is have always and will continue to seek to harm Sunni Muslims while promoting their own deviant religion, which, according to IS, is nothing more than a gross perversion of 'true' Islam. Dialogue and rapprochement are thus not options in the IS narrative because Shi'is by their very nature will continually seek to undermine and harm Sunnis, no matter what they claim. Thus, Sunnis are never safe and are in need of an always vigilant protector against Shi'i violence. IS claims to be such a protector.

Sectarianism rising

The Syrian civil war as catalyst

Sectarian identities were further entrenched as the participation of Shi'i fighters in Syria on the side of the government became increasingly public in 2013. Hasan Nasrallah, the secretary general of Hizbullah, publicly admitted and defended the party's backing of al-Assad in a speech broadcast on the Lebanese Shi'i Islamist party's satellite Al-Manar television channel, leading to strong condemnations by Sunni religious and political leaders, including al-Qaradawi and the rector of Egypt's al-Azhar seminary, Ahmad al-Tayyeb.³³ Egyptian government officials from the *Ikhwan* responded by announcing that Egyptians who travelled to Syria to fight against al-Assad's regime would not be prosecuted.³⁴ Public criticisms of Hizbullah and other Shi'i actors also increased. This marked a significant shift from the Egyptian *Ikhwan*'s previous history of relative ecumenical views toward Shi'is, which were supported by the movement's founder, Hasan al-Banna, and one of its most influential supreme guides (*al-murshid al-'amm*), Hasan al-Hudaybi.³⁵ Unlike the Syrian *Ikhwan*, whose members developed strong anti-Shi'i views in large part because of their conflict with the Alawite al-Assad family and the Syrian regime, Egypt's Brotherhood does not have an extensive history of anti-Shi'ism. Even Sayyid Qutb, its most revolutionary ideologue, did not propagate conflict with the Shi'a, focusing instead on 'reviving' Islam in the country to turn back the tide of the 'modern *Jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic age of ignorance)'.³⁶ Increasing sectarianisation of the Syrian civil war has been a windfall to those rebel factions whose religio-political ideologies include stronger Salafi leanings, including Jabhat al-Nusra, Harakat Ahrar al-Sham and the Islamic Front (p.165) umbrella.³⁷ Syrian Salafis, however, are not the only ones who have adopted a harder anti-Shi'i line. Mainstream Syrian Sunni scholars, such as the prominent Damascene Sunni religious scholar and preacher Usama al-Rifa'i, who was assaulted by regime supporters inside his mosque in August 2011, have also publicly condemned Shi'ism more generally as the civil war has dragged on.³⁸ Al-Rifa'i differentiates between Iranians/Persians and Shi'is, noting that many of the greatest Sunni scholars, including Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210), were Iranian.³⁹

Iran, for its part, remains the Syrian government's chief regional ally and backer. It continues to provide political and military support including shipments of arms and ammunition and military advisers and soldiers from its elite Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). State-owned media outlets have unabashedly portrayed all the Syrian opposition and all Syrian rebel groups as 'Wahhabi/Salafi', thus

justifying the Iranian state's support for al-Assad and his regime as a part of an existential 'defence' of Shi'ism and Shi'is against the hordes of Wahhabism. The Free Syrian Army rebel militia umbrella has been described as a 'terrorist army' by Press TV and other Iranian state-affiliated media outlets since before the rise to prominence of IS in Syria in 2013. The Syrian opposition and rebels are also portrayed by Iranian state media, Hizbullah, and many Iraqi Shi'i Islamists as being tools of Western and Israeli ('Zionist') imperial designs on the Middle East and North Africa and the wider Muslim world.⁴⁰ Hizbullah's Nasrallah has proposed his own spin on the George W. Bush administration argument of 'fighting them over there' so that 'we don't have to fight them here', arguing that the party's involvement inside Syria is necessary to prevent the outbreak of sectarian conflict in Lebanon.⁴¹ The destruction or bombardment of several shrines and tombs by some Syrian rebel groups and the rise of the strongly anti-Shi'i Jabhat al-Nusra and IS have played into the narrative that the Syrian conflict is at its heart a sectarian one in which the al-Assad regime is the 'defender' of the country's minorities, rather than a cynical manipulator of the fears of minority communities.⁴²

The Shi'i shrine complexes of Zaynab bint 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (*Sayyida* Zaynab) and Sakina bint Husayn have been besieged, with the former becoming a major base for the Syrian government and Iraqi Shi'i militiamen fighting alongside government forces. The threats, both real and created, to shrines and the killings of prominent Shi'i figures in Syria such as Nasir al-'Alawi, the director of the Zaynabiyya seminary in Damascus, have been used by the Syrian government and its Shi'i allies such as Hizbullah and the Iraqi Shi'i militias active in the country to attract Shi'i fighters both domestically, regionally and (p.166) even internationally.⁴³ These events have inflamed public opinion, not only among members of pro-Assad Shi'i groups, but also of Shi'is generally, who share a particularly strong reverence for the line of the Prophet Muhammad's family that includes the twelve Imams and members of their families.⁴⁴ There is, however, a clear attempt by the Iranian state, Hizbullah and other Shi'i Islamist groups and figures to steer Shi'i public opinion generally towards a hyper-sectarianised narrative of the Syrian conflict, a project that has benefited greatly from the rapid sweep of IS in western Iraq in June 2014.⁴⁵

The Shi'i sacred topography of Syria

The construction, expansion and promotion of Syria's Shi'i shrines from the late 1970s onwards by the Syrian and Iranian governments is intimately tied to regional politics and particularly to the development of the political alliance between the governments of the two countries.⁴⁶ Funding for the expansion of the shrines, particularly the *Sayyida* Zaynab shrine and its surrounding district and the shrine complex of 'Ammar ibn Yasir and Uways al-Qarani in Raqqa, which was destroyed by the Islamic State in March 2014, has come from a combination of Iranian and Syrian government funding and coordination as well as donations from wealthy Shi'i businessmen from Arab Gulf states, Iran and Pakistan.⁴⁷ The economics of the *Sayyida* Zaynab shrine and the surrounding area have also played an integral role in the development of Syria and specifically Damascus as a major transnational pilgrimage destination since the 1980s.⁴⁸

Despite the relatively recent emergence of Syria's Shi'i shrines as major destinations of transnational pilgrimage and uncertainty, including among Shi'is—about their historical authenticity, with regards to whether the holy figures after whom they are named are actually buried inside—the shrines of *Sayyida* Zaynab and others have been imbued with legitimacy, through their consecration to the holy figures as well as through social processes of sanctification involving miracle and dream stories (in which they are said to engage in intercession on behalf of those who seek their help in connecting with God).⁴⁹

There has been a Shi'i presence in Syria from the early centuries of Islam, and Shi'i institutions have been there since at least the fourteenth century.⁵⁰ Until the outbreak of mass protests against the Syrian government and their eventual evolution into a civil war following government repression, there were a multitude of Shi'i institutions in the country. These included hospitals founded by various Shi'i grand *mujtahids* (*marja' al-taqlid*, plural: *maraji'*),⁵¹ (p.167) including Iran's supreme leader 'Ali Khamenei and the late Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, father of Muqtada al-Sadr and a widely revered Iraqi jurist who was assassinated in 1999 by the Iraqi Ba'th party.⁵² Before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, there were twenty Shi'i seminaries operating in Damascus and near the city of Homs, the largest of them being the the oldest seminary (*hawza*) in Syria, named after Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the Zaynabiyya *hawza*, funded by the Iranian government and affiliated with the Shirazi clerical family and its network of followers and institutions.⁵³

There was competition between the followers of Khamenei, the Shirazi clerical network, and Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr in the *Sayyida* Zaynab district, over defining 'authentic Shi'ism' in terms of ritual practices, particularly with regard to the legitimacy of *tatbir*, a cathartic ritual in which individuals cut their heads in mourning for Husayn ibn 'Ali, the third Shi'i Imam, and many of his family and companions who were killed in battle against a much larger Umayyad army in 680 at Karbala, Iraq. These debates are coupled with divergent political views of each group based on the views of their *marja'*.⁵⁴ Photographs published online, primarily on Facebook accounts of the Shi'i militia groups in Syria, show some fighters participating in *tatbir*, which suggests that at least some of the Shi'i fighters in the *Sayyida* Zaynab area are individually affiliated to the Shirazi network of *mujtahids* rather than Khamenei or the late Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, both of whom have spoken against the bloodletting rituals.⁵⁵ Recruitment advertisements and calls have been broadcast on al-Anwar, two satellite television channels broadcasting from Kuwait and closely affiliated with the Shirazi network.⁵⁶

Up to the outbreak of protests in 2011, the largest numbers of Shi'is in the *Sayyida* Zaynab area were Iranians or Iraqis, many of them refugees seeking to escape the war, or Iraqis whose families had originally settled in Iraq's Shi'i pilgrimage and education centres, such as the southern cities of Najaf and Karbala.⁵⁷ Some of the members of Shi'i militias operating in Syria have reportedly been drawn from segments of these communities, as well as the small Syrian Shi'i community.

Fighting for Zaynab alongside al-Assad: Shi'i foreign fighters in Syria

The mobilisation of Syrian and non-Syrian Shi'i fighters to defend the 'holy places' (*al-muqadassat*), the Shi'i shrines in Syria, began in earnest in 2012. The first reports of growing numbers of Shi'i foreign fighters, mainly from neighbouring Iraq, first appeared in the autumn of that year, including media (p.168) interviews with individual fighters as well as videos posted online by fighters themselves.⁵⁸ Iraqi government officials also acknowledged that there were recruitment drives by Iraqi Shi'i parties to man their militia units inside Syria.⁵⁹ The first major armed Shi'i group in Syria was Liwa' (Brigade) Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas (LAFA), which included fighters from a variety of nationalities, including Afghan Hazara and Lebanese, but was composed mainly of Iraqi and Syrian Shi'i fighters.⁶⁰ The militias, as well as the Hashd al-Sha'bi (Popular Mobilization Forces) umbrella in Iraq, are eager to demonstrate that their ranks include not only Shi'i

Muslims but also Sunnis and non-Muslims.⁶¹ The vast majority of the militias active in Syria, and to a somewhat lesser extent within the Hashd al-Sha'bi umbrella, are, as of this writing, Shi'is, and some of the Sunni fighters siding with the government initially participated in the battle against Islamic State as part of tribal militias, rather than as fully integrated units within the Hashd umbrella.⁶²

The total number of Shi'i fighters in groups aligned with the Syrian government is unclear, with unverified high estimates of up to 10,000, though this estimate includes members of Hizbullah, which is said to have between 3–5,000 fighters inside Syria or along the border with Lebanon, as well as Iraqi fighters, who likely number another 3–5,000, though this number has declined significantly since IS's sweep across western Iraq in the summer of 2014.⁶³ The early numbers in the autumn of 2012, however, were much lower, probably numbering in the high hundreds before recruitment drives in Iraq and Iran began to accelerate throughout 2013. According to an anonymous Shi'i fighter in Syria interviewed by the Associated Press in October 2012, an estimated 200 recruits from Iraq arrived in Syria. Many arrived on pilgrimage buses on which weapons and other military materiel were also transported.⁶⁴ Recruitment and deployment of new fighters and the formation of new armed groups and units within larger, existing groups continued throughout 2013 and into 2014, though many of the Iraqi Shi'i fighters were recalled to Iraq beginning in the spring of 2014 in order to combat the expansion of IS there. IS's 2014 sweep led to an increase in the number of Iraqi Shi'i fighters in Syria returning home to help fill the ranks of Iraqi Shi'i paramilitary units being formed by the country's Shi'i Islamist parties and movements like the Badr Organization, 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq (League of the Righteous), Kata'ib Hizbullah (Brigades of the Party of God), the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, and the Sadr Movement. Some Iraqi Shi'i fighters, however, remained in Syria and Iraqi recruits began to travel back there in the spring of 2015. Hizbullah also maintained and even increased its involvement inside Syria during the second half of 2014 into (p.169) 2015, arguing that it must do so to combat the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra in border areas such as the Qalamoun Mountains.⁶⁵

LAFD and other Shi'i paramilitary groups operating alongside Syrian government forces were largely recruited, organised and trained by existing Iraqi Shi'i socio-political movements and parties, mainly 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, Kata'ib Hizbullah, the Badr Organization, the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, the Movement of the Party of God, Harakat Hizbullah al-Nujaba, and the Sadr Movement of Muqtada al-

Sadr. The involvement of these groups and the armed units they dispatched to Syria is verifiable from martyrdom announcements and other statements, videos and photography produced and published by them and their supporters as well as press reports.⁶⁶ Fighters in militia photography and artwork are often shown posing with photographs of Bashar and Hafiz al-Assad, Nasrallah, and paintings of Shi'i holy figures. Some art-work depicts Bashar and Nasrallah as 'pious' with light emanating from the pages of the Qur'an onto their faces, demonstrating the close ties between the Syrian government, and specifically the person of Bashar, and the Iraqi Shi'i groups operating in Syria.⁶⁷

Lafa includes smaller field units, all of which are named after historical figures revered by Shi'i Muslims, including units named after Imam Husayn's son 'Ali Akbar, al-Qasim ibn Hasan (the son of the second Imam), Sayyida Zaynab, twelfth Imam Muhammad ibn Hasan 'al-Mahdi' (the *Mahdi*, a messianic figure in Shi'i eschatology) and Malik al-Ashtar, a supporter of Imam 'Ali.⁶⁸ The naming and mobilisation frames of the Iraqi groups inside Syria demonstrate their strong Shi'i identities, but Lafa also has some non-Shi'i fighters, including Christians, Sunnis and Druze, whose numbers, though not known precisely, are probably low.⁶⁹ Other Iraqi Shi'i armed groups operating in Syria and Iraq also draw their names from historical figures and idioms revered by Shi'i Muslims, such as the twelve Imams.

Shi'i groups highlight attacks by some rebel groups on Syrian Shi'is, and the destruction or shelling of some Shi'i shrines, mosques and centres (*husayniyyat*) inside the country, as reasons for social and paramilitary mobilisation. These include the shrines of Hujr ibn 'Adi al-Kindi and Sakina, one of Imam Husayn's daughters. Hujr was another of the prophet's companions who supported 'Ali and served as one of the first Imam's battlefield commanders. In May 2013, his shrine in the town of 'Adhra about 20 kilometres east of Damascus was destroyed by Syrian rebel group Liwa' al-Islam (Brigade of Islam). Sakina's shrine in Damascus has been damaged in fighting between the Syrian government, its Shabiha militias, Shi'i armed groups and Syrian rebel groups.⁷⁰ A (p.170) 'wanted' poster was published online by Lafa showing four of the rebels present during the exhumation of the body and the destruction of the shrine.⁷¹ One of the alleged perpetrators is shown in another photograph after being captured, executed and beheaded by brigade militiamen.⁷² The threat to Syria's Shi'i shrines and communities are seen by Iraqi, Lebanese and other Arab Shi'i fighters as being intimately connected

to the ongoing insurgency and conflict between Sunni and Shi'i actors in Iraq. Indeed, many of the Iraqi fighters in Syria publicly proclaim and display their national identities as well as their identity as Shi'is both in battle and in and around the shrines. The collapse of the Syrian regime and the victory of largely Sunni opposition and rebel groups is seen as a disastrous potential outcome, one that will empower groups such as IS and Jabhat al-Nusra, which pose a threat to the region's Shi'is.

Mobilising historical memory and individual piety: Framing sectarian conflict

For their mobilisation frames and narratives the Shi'i paramilitary groups in Syria and Iraq draw upon the historical memory of Islamic history as seen by the Shi'a, chiefly a deep reservoir of cultural idioms from Shi'i history. This view of history revolves around a strong sense of persecution and hardship as a minority community within the wider Islamic world, where the Shi'a are far outnumbered by Sunnis. Feelings of being besieged are coupled with passionate reverence for the honour of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and specifically the line through Fatima and the twelve Imams, who, according to Shi'i historical narratives, were subject to persecution and even assassination during their life-times. Shi'i militiamen, party and group leaders, and *'ulama* in Syria and Iraq frequently invoke the honour of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and in particular certain figures such as Imam Husayn, Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas and *Sayyida* Zaynab in their discourse against the Islamic State, Jabhat al-Nusra and Syrian rebel groups. By doing this, they link themselves to the sacred past and tap into a historical memory of persecution and bravery, the latter from past heroes such as Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas, which in turn is used as a key part of their media operations and recruitment drives. By tapping into historical figures and motifs they are able to also draw upon popular passions and reverence for the *Ahl al-Bayt* among Iraqi Shi'is and Shi'is generally.

At the heart of these historical frames and narratives is the Karbala tragedy, the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and many of his supporters and family members in a battle with a much larger Umayyad military force in 680. The survivors, (p.171) including Husayn's sister, *Sayyida* Zaynab, were taken in chains by the victorious Umayyad force to the seat of their ruler, the caliph Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, in Damascus, where they were subject to additional humiliations and persecution. The commemoration of the Karbala events during the first ten days of the lunar month of 'Ashura, followed by the 'Arba'in commemorations forty days later, is at the centre of the Shi'i year and occupies an important part of Shi'i popular cultures, societies and the public sphere.⁷³ Invocations to the suffering of the defeated at Karbala thus provide the emotional and cultural resonance among target audiences, for example potential recruits, which the Shi'i armed groups are attempting to reach.

Shi'i armed groups in Syria and Iraq all state that at the heart of their purpose is the defence of the honour of the *Ahl al-Bayt* through the defence of the shrines and other holy places dedicated to them. Popular images in Shi'i historical accounts and stories of the bravery of figures such as Husayn and his half-brother, Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas,

are drawn upon by contemporary Shi'i fighters as exemplary models of masculinity and heroism.⁷⁴ Fighters frequently invoke the names of these revered figures during battle and present themselves as being at their command, as demonstrated in popular slogans such as '*Labbayk ya Husayn*' ('at your command, Husayn!') and '*Labbayk ya Zaynab*' and willingness to sacrifice their lives for the Prophet Muhammad's family (*Ahl al-Bayt*).^{75/76} In this section, the historical and cultural importance of some of the most popular references used by the Shi'i armed groups in Syria and Iraq will be surveyed and their importance to the mobilisation frames explained.

Sayyida Zaynab

The sister of the third Shi'i Imam, Zaynab bint 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, is referred to as 'our lady' (*Sayyida*) Zaynab by Shi'is, an honorific noting not only her identity as a member of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, but also her vital role in propagating her brother's message and the purest form of Islam (Shi'ism) after his martyrdom at the hands of the Umayyad governor of Iraq, 'Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, the Umayyad commander 'Umar ibn Sa'd, and ultimately the Umayyad caliph, Yazid ibn Mu'awiya.⁷⁷ Zaynab is remembered and heralded most for the defiant speeches she is said to have delivered in front of 'Ubaydullah and Yazid in which she excoriated them for their persecution of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and distortion of Islam.⁷⁸ Modern readings of Zaynab, beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, portray her as an active participant in the events surrounding Karbala, unlike earlier accounts.⁷⁹ She is even portrayed as a kind of 'co-hero' alongside her brother, Imam Husayn.⁸⁰

(p.172) Shi'i fighters in Syria and Iraq, however, have reverted to older descriptions of her as more 'feminine' and 'passive', in short chiefly as a victim rather than a heroine, and describe themselves as Zaynab's 'guardians' and 'defenders' (*hurras*). They refer to her Syrian shrine and her humiliating imprisonment by the Umayyads between Karbala and Damascus centuries ago, and vow that 'Zaynab will not be taken captive a second time' (*lan tusba Zaynab marratayn*). Each Shi'i fighter is described as a new Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas who will defend Zaynab's honour and sanctity in the face of unbelieving hordes. Historical villains such as the Umayyads are compared to contemporary Salafis, 'Wahhabis' and other Sunni opponents, including the militias of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) umbrella.⁸¹ Syrian Sunni rebel groups are not differentiated from IS and Jabhat al-Nusra. All of them are described by the Shi'i groups as 'Wahhabi/Salafi' and are labelled *nawasib*, a term used by Shi'is to describe those critical of Shi'ism who thus also allegedly hate the *Ahl*

al-Bayt. Contemporary Sunni enemies are equated with historical villains in the Shi'i historical narrative such as Mu'awiya ibn Sufyan, his son Yazid, and other persecutors of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. For example, after he was filmed taking a symbolic bite from an organ of a slain regime soldier, Syrian rebel commander Abu Sakkar was compared to Hind bint 'Utba, one of the Prophet Muhammad's most bitter enemies who, according to some Islamic historical accounts, is said to have eaten the liver of Hamza ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad and one of his greatest warriors, after he had been slain at the Battle of Uhud in 625 on her orders. She is reviled by Shi'is for her actions, though she converted to Islam after the prophet took control of Mecca in 630, and is thus accorded some respect by Sunnis.⁸²

Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas

The half-brother of Husayn, Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas, is noted for his heroism as the Imam's standard bearer during the Battle of Karbala, as well as for his attempt to get water from the Euphrates River for Husayn's young daughter Ruqayya. Despite receiving the offer of a pardon from 'Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, according to some accounts, al-'Abbas rejected it and remained by Husayn's side.⁸³ In an earlier period, notions of al-'Abbas's masculinity and bravery also made him a popular model for Iraqi tribesmen who began gradually adopting Shi'ism during the nineteenth century.⁸⁴

In Syria, Shi'i fighters frequently use the slogan, 'We are all your 'Abbas, O' Zaynab' (*kulluna 'Abbasak, ya Zaynab*). The contemporary fighters see themselves (p.173) as modern-day versions of al-'Abbas, the great hero who fought until his last breath and sacrificed himself in defence of 'true Islam' as embodied by his half-brother, Husayn. By invoking al-'Abbas, Shi'i militia recruiters and leaders seek to tap into notions of masculinity and courageousness, primarily among men and in particular Shi'i youth. Indeed, in the discourse of Shi'i militias in Syria and Iraq those individuals who fall in battle, whether against IS or other groups, are described as having 'sacrificed themselves in defence of the Holy Sites' (*istashida fi al-difa' 'an al-muqaddasat*).⁸⁵ Martyrs and their deaths are 'presented' to God as offerings or even symbolic sacrifices (*qurban*) in 'defence of Islam, the Holy Places, the nation' and they are said to have embraced danger and martyrdom willingly and with joy, often being referred to as 'the joyful martyr' (*al-shahid al-sa'id*).⁸⁶ The martyrdom discourses of Shi'i and Sunni armed groups are remarkably similar in terms of language, terminology and metaphors used, and even visual presentations,

though the former include references to the Twelve Imams and other historical holy figures absent in the media output of the latter.

The twelve Imams and other members and supporters of the *Ahl al-Bayt*

The twelve Imams, whom Shi'is regard as the designated successors of the Prophet Muhammad as the leaders and guides of the Muslims, have also been invoked to encourage social and armed mobilisations in Syria and Iraq. The first and third Imams, 'Ali and his son, Husayn, and the twelfth Imam, the 'Mahdi' Muhammad ibn Hasan, have each had Shi'i militias in Syria and Iraq named after them. These include *Kata'ib al-Imam 'Ali* (Brigades of Imam 'Ali),⁸⁷ *Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada'* (Brigades of the Commander of the Martyrs, referencing one of Husayn's honorifics)⁸⁸ and *Katibat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar* (Brigade of the Awaited Mahdi). 'Ali's famous sword, Zulfiqar, has also been adopted by an Iraqi Shi'i militia in Syria, Liwa' Zulfiqar (Brigade of Zulfiqar). According to Shi'i beliefs, the twelfth Imam is currently in the state of mystical concealment, the 'greater occultation' (*al-ghayba al-kubra*) and will emerge from it at a divinely appointed time to fight apocalyptic villains, reward sincere Shi'is, punish those who falsely claim to love and follow the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and usher in a period of justice before the Day of Judgement.

Other members or supporters of the *Ahl al-Bayt* have also served as the reference points for the naming and mobilisation frames of Shi'i militias. Among them are 'Ali Akbar, Qasim ibn al-Hasan, Malik al-Ashtar and 'Ammar ibn Yasir. 'Ali Akbar was the teenage son of Imam Husayn who was (p.174) killed with his father at Karbala, said to have recited the call to prayer on the morning of the day he was martyred.⁸⁹ Qasim was the son of the second Imam, Hasan, who according to popular Shi'i elegiac collections such as the sixteenth-century *Garden of the Martyrs* (*Rawzat-i Shuhada'*) is referred to today, particularly in South Asian Shi'i ritual cultures, as the 'bridegroom of Karbala' because he married Imam Husayn's daughter Fatima al-Kubra on the morning of the day he was killed.⁹⁰ At first forbidden from fighting, he succeeds in getting his uncle's permission to enter the battle after finding a written instruction from his father to do so. Immediately after being wed, he leaves for battle, replying to pleas from Fatima that he not go with a promise that their wedding feast will be on the Day of Resurrection, on which she will recognize him by a sleeve he tears before leaving for the battlefield.⁹¹

Malik al-Ashtar was one of the Prophet Muhammad's companions (*sahaba*), also a loyalist of Imam 'Ali, fighting alongside him at the Battle of the Camel in 656 against the rebelling forces of two other companions, Talha and al-Zubayr and 'Aisha, one of the prophet's widows. Malik was later appointed by 'Ali, then the caliph, as governor of Egypt, but was poisoned while travelling to take up the

post on the orders of 'Ali's rival, Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, who would become the first Umayyad caliph. Upon hearing of Malik's death, Mu'awiya reportedly crowed that he had cut off 'Ali's two 'right hands', referring to Malik and 'Ammar ibn Yasir, another companion of the prophet loyal to 'Ali, who had been killed previously at the Battle of Siffin between the forces of Mu'awiya and 'Ali.⁹²

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Iranian government, with the permission of the Syrian regime, funded the construction of a large double shrine complex for 'Ammar ibn Yasir and Uways al-Qarani, built in an Iranian/Central Asian architectural style. The shrine complex displaced older, local shrines to the two companions who were the focus, particularly the latter, of devotion by locals.⁹³ Hagiographies published in Beirut and Baghdad since the Second World War placed increasing importance on the two as Shi'i martyrs and partisans of Imam 'Ali.⁹⁴ Similarly, the shrine of *Sayyida* Zaynab in Damascus became increasingly Shi'i, transforming from a local shrine to one of international prestige and the destination for increasing numbers of Shi'i pilgrims, many of them from Iran.⁹⁵ The shrine construction, in addition to its religious purposes, was also a profoundly political act meant to solidify ties between the Iranian and Syrian governments; it demonstrated the power of the Syrian state to impose itself locally, particularly in Raqqa, which, unlike Damascus, has had no significant local Shi'i community historically.⁹⁶ The shrine complex was the (p.175) centrepiece of conferences on anti-Zionism organised by the Iranian Cultural Centre in 1997 and 2000, and has also served as the point for the sale and distribution of Shi'i literature and recordings of lectures as well as being the site of lectures and classes about the twelve Imams and their supporters.⁹⁷

By drawing upon resonant historical narratives and popular notions of piety, masculinity and nationalism, particularly in the case of Iraqi Shi'i mobilisation to fight IS inside the country and particularly among Shi'i youth, the party/group leaders and recruiters are attempting to portray volunteering in one of the militias as a sanctified religious duty. Enlisting is also portrayed as a way to avenge historical wrongs by fighting the 'descendants' of villains in Shi'i historical narratives, such as Yazid and Mu'awiya. By doing so, the recruits are able to achieve a cathartic release to counter the sense of continual persecution and impending eradication at the hands of hostile enemies, leading to a sense of empowerment in the face of perceived global hostility or ambivalence towards Shi'is,

Shi'ism and, in the case of Iraqi Shi'i Islamist parties and armed groups, the fate of the Iraqi nation-state.

Intra-Shi'i dynamics, the Mujtahids and armed mobilisation in Syria and Iraq

Many of the Iraqi Shi'i groups in Iraq that are heavily involved in the recruitment and deployment of fighters in Syria are part of the broad and discordant Sadrist current in Iraqi Shi'i politics, that is, groups who base their legitimacy in part on a claimed connection to the late Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (1943–99), recognised as a *marja' al-taqlid* by his millions of followers (*muqallidun*), who was assassinated in Najaf with two of his sons by the Iraqi Ba'th.⁹⁸ He is known among his followers as 'the second Martyr al-Sadr' (*al-shahid al-Sadr al-thani*) in reference to the honorific of Zayn al-Din al-'Amili, a famous Levantine Shi'i hadith scholar (*muhaddith*) and jurist who was executed by the Ottomans in 1558 and is known as 'the Second Martyr' (*al-shahid al-thani*).⁹⁹

A populist religious scholar and jurist, he had during his lifetime a large following in both southern and central Iraq, particularly in the shrine city of Kufa, where he preached from the city's central mosque, and in the poor district of Baghdad known today as Sadr City, formerly Revolution City and Saddam City.¹⁰⁰ Sadiq al-Sadr and his aides built a large grass-roots social network of mosques, *husayniyyat*¹⁰¹ and other institutions in these areas. Following the collapse of the Iraqi Ba'thist government in the face of the massive (p.176) US and British-led coalition invasion of the country, the martyred grand ayatollah's son, Muqtada, and his supporters mobilised by using this grass-roots network, becoming a powerful social and political force.¹⁰²

Initially the broad Sadrist current was largely, if somewhat nominally, directed by Muqtada, but since 2003 it has become increasingly fractious and segments of it broke away to form new groups or to promote their own identities as grand *mujtahids* (grand ayatollahs, *maraji' al-taqlid*, singular: *marja' al-taqlid*). They remain connected, even if loosely, however, by their claims of representing the 'true' legacy of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. These groups include the mainstream Sadr Movement (*Tayyar al-Sadr*) led by Muqtada, Grand Ayatollah Kazim al-Ha'iri, 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, Grand Ayatollah Qasim al-Ta'i, and other, smaller Sadrist splinter groups.

Competition between these groups and personalities is centred on their rival claims to social, religious and political authority based on their claims to represent Muhammad Sadiq's intellectual legacy. One

way for those with smaller numbers of followers to compete is by harnessing popular pieties and hyper-communalism in the form of sectarianism to win more followers from among those individuals who are more interested in engaging in counter-polemics with Sunnis. Some, such as some followers of the Shirazi network of *mujtahids*, even engage in proselytisation aimed at other Shi'is who do not follow their *marja' al-taqlid*. The adoption of more overtly sectarian rhetoric by some younger, less established religious and political figures is a means through which they hope to solidify a place for themselves as self-declared new *mujtahids*. They also hope to attract potentially greater numbers of followers and thus gain more revenue from religious taxes such as *khums*, the one-fifth share due to the Imam which is collected, during his occultation, by the *'ulama*. This inter-generational competition among different segments of the *'ulama* has also historically occurred in other places, such as in India during the 1930s when a distinct Indian Shi'i identity began to form vis-à-vis the majority Sunnis.¹⁰³

Among the most active supporters of Iraqi Shi'i armed mobilisation in Syria have been Qasim al-Ta'i (b. 1970), a self-declared grand *mujtahid*, and 'Asa'ib Ahl a-Haqq, a Sadrist splinter group that emerged in 2006 after its founder and current leader, Qays al-Khaz'ali, broke away from the Sadr Movement's armed wing, the Mahdi's Army (*Jaysh al-Imam al-Mahdi*).¹⁰⁴ Both have challenged Muqtada and other Iraqi Shi'i political and religious leaders for influence over the country's Shi'is. They draw upon the alarm of Shi'is generally, in both Iraq and around the world, at the rise to prominence and power of Salafi (p.177) political forces in countries such as Egypt, the continued influence of Saudi Arabia and its Salafi *'ulama*, and the rise of virulently and violently anti-Shi'i armed groups such as the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra in the wake of the abortive Arab Spring.¹⁰⁵ Recruits and other supporters of Shi'i armed mobilisation in Syria have created and deployed mobilisation frames to convince their target audiences of their fate and the fate of Shi'i communities in countries such as Lebanon and Iraq. The danger in Syria is portrayed as an existential threat to the region's Shi'is.

Al-Ta'i, a former student of Muhammad Sadiq, formerly served time in prison during the Ba'thist period. Under the late ayatollah, al-Ta'i studied jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*). After the Muhammad Sadiq's assassination, al-Ta'i studied *usul al-fiqh* under a number of other jurists including Grand Ayatollahs 'Ali al-Sistani and Muhammad Ishaq Fayyad in Najaf.¹⁰⁶ Previously a relatively minor figure, al-Ta'i has adeptly used the issue of the danger to the Shi'i shrines in Syria

in his mobilisation calls to increase his standing among a segment of Iraqi Shi'is. He has visited the besieged shrine of *Sayyida* Zaynab, delivered lectures and dispensed religious advice and support to Shi'i fighters there; then in December 2012 he established a representative office in the *Sayyida* Zaynab district to the south of Damascus.¹⁰⁷ His office in Iraq has also organised and sponsored events there to support armed groups such as LAFA in Syria and has been thanked by Shi'i fighters there.¹⁰⁸

The most explicit juridical support for armed mobilisation in Syria has come from Grand Ayatollah Kazim al-Ha'iri, another former *hawza* student of Muhammad Sadiq who is an Iraqi grand *mujtahid* residing in the Iranian seminary and shrine city of Qum. He has issued at least two responses to questions about his religious juridical opinion on the permissibility of Shi'is travelling to Syria to 'defend the holy places'.¹⁰⁹ In a juridical opinion (*fatwa*) dated 18 November 2013, al-Ha'iri responds to a question from a group of individuals who follow him as their *marja' al-taqlid*, stating that the question of fighting in Syria 'is not just a question of Syria or a question of defending [the shrines of] *Sayyida* Zaynab and *Sayyida* Ruqayya, peace be upon them, but a question of confronting unbelief in its entirety (*muwajahat al-kufr kullahu*), unbelief targeting the light of Islam'. In a shorter fatwa dated 25 May 2013, he also states that the defence of the 'light of Islam' is not only permissible but required, though he does not include specific mentions of the Syrian Shi'i shrines.¹¹⁰ In both, al-Ha'iri closes by noting that it is also obligatory to avoid serving under a 'corrupt leadership' (*wa la budd min al-taharruz 'an al-'amal tahta zill qiyadatin fasidatin*).¹¹¹ This 'corrupt leadership' is not specified, (p.178) though it is possible that he is referring to the Syrian government. In the November 2013 fatwa al-Ha'iri references the authority (*wilaya*) of the 'leader of the Muslims' (*wali amr al-muslimin*), Iran's supreme leader 'Ali Khamenei.

'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq took advantage of the unclear position of Muqtada—his mainstream Sadr Movement—regarding fighting in Syria, by adopting an aggressive strategy of recruitment of fighters to dispatch there.¹¹² The group benefits from its close alliance with Iran, which has provided it with material and logistical support for its activities in both Syria and Iraq. More recently, it is attempting to become a political force by creating a political wing to compete in local and national elections.¹¹³ By invoking the legacy of the martyred Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr and adopting a position and image of strength against the 'enemies of Shi'is' in Syria, the group and specifically its leader, al-Khaz'ali, have tried to woo Muqtada's

followers. After the Islamic State's sweep across western Iraq during the summer of 2014, 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq has repositioned itself as one of the main Iraqi Shi'i groups providing fighters to aid the national army, police and other security forces in the Popular Mobilization Units (*al-Hashd al-Sha'bi*, PMU) paramilitary umbrella organisation.

'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq's secretary general, Qays al-Khaz'ali, formerly a chief aide to Muqtada al-Sadr, has said that the ongoing battles in Iraq and Syria are one conflict rather than separate conflicts.¹¹⁴ A charismatic leader with a reportedly magnetic personality, al-Khaz'ali was imprisoned in Iraq by US military forces between 2007 and late 2009 or early 2010, and ever since his release has been at the forefront of collective Iraqi Shi'i Islamists most closely aligned with Iran.¹¹⁵ He has alleged that the US is 'not serious' in its anti-IS campaign, but his group has threatened to treat US military advisers, Marines and special forces deployed to support Iraqi government forces as enemies.¹¹⁶ In remarks at a mass celebration marking the tenth anniversary of 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq's founding, al-Khaz'ali alleged:

What is happening generally in the region and what is happening in Syria in particular is a conspiracy in the full sense of the word. It is intended [by the US, European states, their Arab allies, Israel] that Syria be the nucleus for starting the fire of sedition and discord (*fitna*) in every region and especially in Iraq. And despite all of their reservations concerning the Syrian regime not being a democratic regime in governing our sister country, Syria, over the decades, the strangest and most amazing thing is that the monarchical, hereditary regimes and the ruling dictatorial regimes in the Arab world are the ones calling for democracy in Syria. And it is even stranger that the U.S., Britain, and France, who claim to be fighting terrorism, are supporting the military option and the armed opposition, whose (p.179) *takfiri* views were fully displayed recently when the so-called Free [Syrian] Army dug up and desecrated the shrine of the Prophet's companion Hujr bin 'Adi.¹¹⁷

He also noted how the West, despite calling for democracy, has turned a blind eye to events in Bahrain despite there being, he said, no '*takfiri*' or armed groups among the (largely) peaceful popular protests for democratic governance.¹¹⁸ The group has also accused 'foreign powers' of causing sectarian violence in Iraq and does not differentiate between the diverse array of Syrian rebel groups, accusing them all of being '*takfiri*' and in league with the West, Israel

and Sunni Arab states in forwarding their projects of 'imperialism and Zionism'.¹¹⁹

In the midst of Iranian state support and the support of Iraqi groups and religious figures such as al-Ha'iri, al-Ta'i and 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, Iraq's most revered and influential resident grand *mujtahids*, the grand ayatollahs al-Sistani, Fayyad, Bashir Najafi and Muhammad Sa'id al-Hakim, did not support the mobilisation of Shi'is to fight in Syria.¹²⁰ The aggressive expansion inside Iraq of the Islamic State, following its victories in Syria during the first half of 2014,¹²¹ was seen as a clear existential threat to the Iraqi nation-state and specifically Iraqi Shi'is. In response, al-Sistani, Fayyad, Najafi, al-Hakim and other Shi'i *mujtahids* in Iraq, such as Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi, issued calls for the government to redouble its efforts to defend the nation; they supported, in juridical terms, the collective struggle (*al-jihad al-kifa'i*) against the Islamic State.¹²² Importantly, al-Sistani's *fatwa* calling for volunteers to the national security forces was addressed to all Iraqis and not only Shi'is, continuing the grand *mujtahid's* history of promoting Iraqi national unity and opposing the division of the country by ethnic group and sect.

In response to their calls, tens of thousands of Iraqi Shi'is volunteered to join armed units formed by existing groups such as the Badr Organisation, 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (Leader of the Martyrs' Brigades, referencing an honorific of Imam Husayn), the Sadr Movement (the 'Peace Battalions,' *Saraya al-Salam*) and Kata'ib Hizbullah, as well as newly formed paramilitary groups such as Kata'ib al-Imam 'Ali (Brigades of Imam 'Ali). The PMU remains a largely Iraqi Shi'i grass-roots force, though as of June 2015 growing numbers of Sunni Arabs, primarily from tribes and clans opposed to the Islamic State and its tribal allies, are joining groups within the paramilitary umbrella.¹²³ The PMU, with coordination and strategic leadership provided by the IRGC and with US air power and military support for the Iraqi army, contributed significantly to the recapture of Tikrit in late March 2015 and has been deployed in other areas of the country, including the restive governorates of Anbar, Babil, Diyala and Saladin, where the Islamic (p.180) State maintains a strong presence. It remains to be seen, as of this writing, whether the strong grass-roots support and organic formation of the fighting units that make up the umbrella organisation will also take hold among Iraq's Sunni Arabs more broadly.¹²⁴ Tensions between PMU and other Shi'i militia forces and Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish forces dramatically increased following the retreat of IS from Sinjar in November 2015

following reports that Kurdish fighters were persecuting and expelling Iraqi Shi'i Turkmen and Arabs and looting their homes and businesses in a land grab.¹²⁵

It remains unclear at present whether the Iraqi central government will be able to control the groups within the PMU in the longer term, or whether the groups will be answerable more to other actors such as Shi'i religious leaders in the shrine cities of Najaf, Karbala and Kufa and the IRGC, particularly after the IS threat subsides.¹²⁶ PMU, militia and Islamist party leaders such as al-Khaz'ali, al-'Ameri and Muqtada al-Sadr are taking political advantage of the Iraqi central government's reliance on their manpower in the fight against IS and have increasingly demanded more financial autonomy and support as well as political concessions.¹²⁷

Al-Sistani has also publicly cautioned PMU fighters, warning them not to perpetrate abuses and other crimes against civilians or Iraqi Sunnis generally, which has occurred in some instances despite his earlier calls for unity, demonstrating that despite his influence, his authority has its limits.¹²⁸ In 2006 and 2007, following multiple bombings of the al-'Askariyya shrine in Samarra by the group known today as the Islamic State, al-Sistani issued a series of statements calling for patience and forbidding acts of retaliation against Iraqi Sunnis. His words, however, were trumped by powerful political players such as the Iran-backed and aligned Badr Organisation,¹²⁹ led by Hadi al-'Ameri, and segments of the Sadrist *Jaysh al-Imam al-Mahdi* engaged in counter-sectarian violence against Iraqi Sunnis. His and other voices of unity and reason were overshadowed by virulent and overtly violent and sectarian voices.

In his most recent public call, al-Sistani warned Iraqis fighting in the various anti-IS forces and particularly those engaged in military jihad, one of the 'pillars of the religion', as mujahidin to uphold the conditions and regulations governing warfare in the name of God. Just as God has made jihad one of the foundations of Islam and has favoured mujahidin over those who do not fight (*al-qa'idin*), he wrote, He 'has also placed certain conditions and a mode of conduct for *jihad*' on those engaged in it.¹³⁰ This proper conduct should be modelled, according to the grand *ayatollah*, on the Prophet Muhammad's own actions and Qur'anic directives and prohibitions on 'extremism', the mutilation and desecration (p.181) of the dead, even enemies, killing women, the elderly or children, and cutting down trees or razing crops.¹³¹ Mujahidin should also follow the example set by 'Ali ibn Abi Talib who, even when faced with the brutality and extremism of the Kharijites, did not deviate from the regulations

governing proper conduct of military jihad. Indeed, he resisted calls from the Kharijites when they were still within the ranks of his own forces to harm the families of enemy combatants or loot their property. It is the first Imam's example also that the PMU and other Shi'i fighters should follow, al-Sistani stated.¹³²

Grand Ayatollah Bashir Najafi, in a statement, proclaimed his support for those fighting against the 'enemies of humanity, the *takfiris* [those who declare other Muslims to be apostates]'.¹³³ The 'martyrs who fell on the battlefield' are a source of pride for the Muslims who 'cherish and honour' the blood they have spilled defending the nation and Islam.¹³⁴ He prayed for God to raise 'scores of martyrs' and grant them places alongside others who have 'sacrificed themselves' in defence of Islam, just like the third Imam, Husayn bin 'Ali.¹³⁵ He also praised the parents of those 'martyred' for encouraging their children to the 'field of glory, dignity, and high honour', the path of jihad.¹³⁶ Najafi, one of the four *marja' al-taqlids* in Najaf, previously endorsed the '*shari'a*, national, and moral duty' of deterring IS through 'defensive *jihad*' (*al-jihad al-difa'i*).¹³⁷ Muhammad Sa'id al-Hakim, one of the other four grand ayatollahs in Najaf, echoed Najafi's support for those fighting the jihad against IS and also called for the mujahidin to abide by the regulations for warfare set down by the Qur'an and the *sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams.¹³⁸

Conclusion

The rise of IS, Jabhat al-Nusra and powerful Salafi Syrian rebel groups such as Harakat Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam have alarmed Shi'is in the Middle East and the wider world, fuelling the rise of Shi'i armed groups in the region and particularly in Syria and Iraq. The extreme and brutal violence of IS and some other Sunni jihadist and some Syrian and Iraqi rebel actors have resurrected images of persecution and repression from the recent and distant past for many Shi'is, and it is this emotional response and real fear of a renewed existential threat that have enabled Shi'i Islamist actors to be successful in recruiting scores of thousands, of mostly young men, to enlist in an array of armed groups. Recruiters for these groups have designed mobilisation frames and recruitment calls that tap into this fear while also providing a way to glory and the fulfilment of personal piety by 'defending' the *Ahl al-Bayt* against (p.182) 'Wahhabi' hordes who seek to defile their shrines and eradicate their followers, the Shi'is.

IS, Jabhat al-Nusra and other Sunni armed actors similarly have crafted narratives of persecution, in this case of an empowered minority community, the 'Alawis in Syria and the Shi'is in Iraq, running roughshod over a Sunni majority. This persecution is so severe, according to their mobilisation narratives, that an armed response is the only possible solution, the only way to defend Sunnis from Shi'i repression. Like their Shi'i opponents, IS, Jabhat al-Nusra and other Sunni actors draw upon their particular vision of history in order to explain and justify their strategies and actions, connecting contemporary Shi'i enemies to historical 'traitors' and 'villains' of old, such as Ibn Saba, Ibn al-'Alqami and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi.¹³⁹

Both Shi'i and Sunni groups and religious and political figures not only draw upon particular hyper-sectarianised readings and interpretations of history, but also contemporary narratives and realities of persecution and repression. Their competing mobilisation frames, which are dialogic and formed in relation to the frames of rival groups and communities, draw upon 'religious' motifs and language as yet another way, in addition to political grievances, of justifying their armed response, often shockingly brutal, to perceived existential threats. All-out war is necessary, many of these actors argue, because it is the only way to ensure the survival of their respective communities. Their discourse is neither wholly 'religious' nor solely 'political', but rather is a combination of both; it is a comprehensive argument justifying certain actions that draw upon

motifs of both 'religious' requirement, permissibility and sanctity, as well as of contemporary issues of persecution and political alienation.

Notes:

(1.) Shi'i Islam is divided into several different groups: (1) Twelver or Imami Shi'is, so-called because they believe in a line of twelve divinely guided leaders, the Imams; (2) Isma'ili Shi'is, who believe in the same line of Imams as the Twelvers up until the sixth, Ja'far al-Sadiq, who died in the eighth century C.E.; and (3) Zaydi Shi'is, whose beliefs and scholarly tradition lay between Sunni and Shi'i Islam. Unless otherwise noted, 'Shi'i' will be used throughout this chapter to denote Twelver Shi'is, the largest group of Shi'i Muslims.

(2.) Khamenei even delivered part of his Friday sermon (*khutba*) on 4 February 2011 at Tehran University (long a major political showcase for the Iranian state to broadcast its official religio-political positions) in Arabic in a transparent effort to win more supporters in the Arab world. Henner Fürtig, *Iran and the Arab Spring: Between Expectations and Dillusion*, working paper no. 241, German Institute of Global and Areas Studies, November 2013; Robert F. Worth, 'Effort to Rebrand Arab Spring Backfires in Iran', *New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/03/world/middleeast/effort-to-rebrand-arab-spring-backfires-in-iran.html?_r=0, accessed 2 February 2012; and Margaret Basheer, 'Hezbollah Supportive of Egyptian, Tunisian Uprisings, but not Syria's', *Voice of America*, <http://www.voanews.com/content/hezbollah-supportive-of-egyptian-tunisian-uprisings-but-not-syrias-122348949/172965.html>, accessed 19 May 2011.

(3.) See, for example, the following studies on sectarian identities, their creation, reification and use: Ussama Makdisi's seminal study on the political and social utilisation of sectarianism in Ottoman Lebanon, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lebanon*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press (2000); Marc Lynch, 'The War for the Arab World', *Foreign Policy*, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/05/23/war_for_the_arab_world_sunni_shia_hatred?page=0,0, accessed 23 May 2013; Geneive Abdo, *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide*, analysis paper 29, Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings (2013), <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2013/04/sunni%20shia%20abdo/sunni%20shia%20abdo.pdf>, accessed 23 May 2015; and Mariz Tadros, 'Sectarianism and its Discontents in Post-

Mubarak Egypt', *Middle East Report* (Summer 2011), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer259/sectarianism-its-discontents-post-mubarak-egypt>, accessed 15 June 2015.

(4.) For good overviews of Sunni—Shi'i relations historically, see Ofra Bengio and Meir Litvak, eds, *The Sunna and Shi'a in History: Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2011); and Brigitte Maréchal and Sami Zemni, eds, *The Dynamics of Sunni—Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*, London: Hurst & Co. (2013).

(5.) I draw here on social movement theory literature about the framing process. See Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press (2004), pp. 15–19; Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1974); David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr, Steven K. Worden and Robert D. Benford, 'Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation', *American Sociological Review* 51:5 (1986): 464–81; David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization', in Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi and Sidney Tarrow, eds, *International Social Movement Research, Vol. 1: From Structure to Action: Comparing Social Movement Research Across Cultures*, London: JAI Press (1988); and Pamela Oliver and Hank Johnston, 'What a Good Idea: Frames and Ideologies in Social Movement Research', *Mobilization* 5:1 (2000): 37–54.

(6.) Ann Swidler, 'Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies', *American Sociological Review* 51:2 (1986): 273–86; and Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, 'Interests, Ideas, and Islamist Outreach in Egypt', in Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, Indiana: Indiana University Press, (2004).

(7.) For detailed analysis of the rise of a politicised Egyptian Salafism, see Jonathan Brown, *Salafis and Sufis in Egypt*, occasional paper, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (December 2011); Jonathan A. C. Brown, 'The Rise and Fall of the Salafi al-Nour Party in Egypt', *Jadaliyya*, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/15113/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-salafi-al-nour-party-in-e>, accessed 14 November 2013; and Jacob Høigilt and Frida Nome, 'Egyptian Salafism in Revolution', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 25: 1 (2014): 333–54.

(8.) Khalil al-Anani, 'The Salafi-Brotherhood Feud in Egypt', *Al Monitor*, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/02/muslim-brotherhood-salafist-feud-in-egypt.html#>, accessed 21 February 2013.

(9.) Maggie Fick, 'Egypt Brotherhood backs Syria Jihad, Denounces Shi'ites', <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/14/us-syria-crisis-sunnis-brotherhood-idUS-BRE95D0NL20130614>, accessed 14 June 2013.

(10.) Al-Qaradawi is an *Ikhwan* affiliated religious jurist and one of the world's most influential Sunni religious scholars.

(11.) 'Top Egypt Cleric Condemns "Sectarian" Foes in Syria', Reuters, <http://news.yahoo.com/top-egypt-cleric-condemns-sectarian-foes-syria-151654244.html>, accessed 11 June 2013; Lee Keath, 'Hezbollah Entry in Syria Fans Shiite—Sunni Fires', Associated Press, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/hezbollah-entry-syria-fans-shiite-sunni-fires>, accessed 7 June 2013; 'Al-Qaradawi Calls Upon the Able-bodied to Fight in Syria' (Arabic), *Qaradwi.net*, <http://www.qaradawi.net/component/content/article/6666.html>, accessed 1 June 2013; Griff Witte, 'New Wave of Foreigners in Syrian Fight', *Washington Post*, accessed 21 June 2013; and 'Sending of Egyptian Mujahideen to Syria Stirs Debate among Religious Scholars and Jihadi Organizations', *Azzaman*, <http://www.azzaman.com/?p=35709>, accessed 31 May 2013.

(12.) David H. Warren, 'The *'Ulamā* and the Arab Uprisings, 2011–2013: Considering Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the "Global Mufti," between the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Legal Tradition, and Qatari Foreign Policy', *New Middle Eastern Studies* 4 (2014); Frederic M. Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings*, New York: Columbia University Press (2013), ch. 5; CNN Arabic, 'Al-Qaradawi: Bahrain's Sectarian Revolution is Targeting the Sunnis' (Arabic), <http://archive.arabic.cnn.com/2011/bahrain.2011/3/19/qaradawi.bahrain/>, accessed 7 February 2013; and al-Sharq al-Awsat, 'Al-Qaradawi: What is Happening in Bahrain is not a People's Revolution but a Sectarian Revolution' (Arabic), <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11799&article=613210#.VYRZRFPoa24>, accessed 19 March 2011.

(13.) BBC News, 'Egypt Mob Attack Kills Four Shia Muslims near Cairo', <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23026865>, accessed 24 June 2013; Ahram Online, 'Egyptian anti-Sectarian Group Blames Morsi for Shia Attacks', <http://english.ahram.org.eg/>

NewsContent/1/64/74811/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-antisectarian-group-blames-Morsi-for-Shia.aspx, accessed 24 June 2013; Mada Masr, 'Suspect Arrested in June Shia Lynching', <http://www.madamasr.com/news/suspect-arrested-june-shia-lynching>, accessed 20 October 2013; Daily News Egypt, 'Lynching of Shi'a in Giza Prompts Uproar', <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/06/25/lynching-of-shia-in-giza-prompts-uproar/>, accessed 25 June 2013; Human Rights Watch, 'Egypt: Lynching of Shia Follows Months of Hate Speech', <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/27/egypt-lynching-shia-follows-months-hate-speech>, accessed 27 June 2013.

(14.) Al-'Alam, 'Who is Martyr Sheikh Hassan Shehata?' <http://en.alalam.ir/news/1487900>, accessed 25 June 2013; and Press TV, 'Takfiri Extremists Kill Top Shia Cleric and 4 Others in Egypt', <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/06/24/310617/prominent-shia-sheikh-killed-in-egypt/>, accessed 24 June 2013.

(15.) For a detailed overview of the Salafi creed, see Bernard Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', in Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, New York: Columbia University Press (2009), pp. 33–57; Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29:3 (2006): 207–39; Alexander Knysh, 'Contextualizing the Salafi—Sufi Conflict (from the Northern Caucasus to Hadramawt)', *Middle Eastern Studies* 43:4 (2007): 503–30; Ondrej Beranek and Pavel Tupek, *From Visiting Graves to Their Destruction: The Question of Ziyara through the Eyes of the Salafis*, Crown Paper no. 2, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University (July 2009); Guido Steinberg, 'Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi'is: Remarks about the Intellectual Roots of anti-Shi'ism', in Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism*, pp. 111–16; Bernard Haykel, 'Al-Qa'ida and Shiism', in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman, eds, *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures*, New York: Routledge (2011), pp. 188–9; and Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State*, Analysis Paper no. 19, Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World (March 2015), pp. 8–9.

(16.) Fanar Haddad, 'Sectarian Relations and Sunni Identity in Post-Civil War Iraq', in Lawrence G. Potter, ed., *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, London: Hurst & Co. (2013), pp. 67–116; and Thomas Pierret, 'Karbala in the Umayyad Mosque: Sunnite Panic at the 'Shiitization of Syria in the 2000s', in Maréchal and Zemni, *The Dynamics of Sunni—Shia Relationships*, pp. 99–116.

(17.) Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama: The Perilous History of Syria's Muslim Brotherhood*, London: Hurst & Co. (2013), chs 4–6; Itzhak Weismann, 'Sa'id Hawwa: The Making of a Radical Muslim Thinker in Modern Syria', *Middle Eastern Studies* 29:4 (2007): 601–23; Itzhak Weismann, 'Sa'id Hawwa and Islamic Revivalism in Ba'thist Syria' *Studia Islamica*, no. 85 (1997), pp. 131–54; Sa'id Hawwa, *Khumayni: Aberrations in Creed, Aberrations in Positions: First Edition* (Arabic), Amman: Dar 'Ammar li-l-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'a (1987); and Steinberg, 'Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi'is', pp. 117–21.

(18.) Haykel, 'Al-Qa'ida and Shiism', pp. 189–90.

(19.) Al-Qaeda Central, *Meeting with the Mujahid Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri: The Realities of Jihad and the Fallacy of Hypocrisy* (Arabic), film, released August 2009.

(20.) Ayman al-Zawahiri, 'General Guidelines for Jihadi Action' (Arabic), September 2013.

(21.) Ibid.

(22.) Joas Wagemakers, 'Invoking Zarqawi: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Jihad Deficit', *CTC Sentinel* 2:6 (June 2009), pp. 14–17; Haykel, 'Al-Qa'ida and Shiism,' pp. 190–98.

(23.) For an in-depth discussion of this tension, see Brynjar Lia, 'Jihadis Divided between Strategists and Doctrinarians', in Moghadam and Fishman, eds, *Fault Lines in Global Jihad*, pp. 69–87; and Brynjar Lia, "'Destructive Doctrinarians": Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's Critique of the Salafis in the Jihadi Current', in Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism*, pp. 281–300.

(24.) AQAP is careful to differentiate between mainstream Zaydis and the Houthi movement, alleging that the Houthis and their supporters have: adopted Twelver Shi'i beliefs and rituals including the cursing of the Prophet Muhammad's companions (*Sahaba*) and wives revered by Sunnis, are proxies of Iran, and are engaged in attacking Yemen's majority Sunnis. See Abu al-Bara' al-San'ani, 'The Houthis, *Rawafid* (Twelver Shi'is)', in *Zaydi Masks, Sada al-Malahim* (e-magazine of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, AQAP), issue 12 (Feb. 2010), pp. 20–21; and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), '*Fatwa* (juridical opinion) of the *Shari'a* Council of Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula concerning Fighting the Shi'i Houthis in the South of the Arabian Peninsula' (Arabic), 18 Jan. 2012; Anwar al-'Awlaqi, *You Should Make It Clear to People and Not Conceal It* (Arabic), AQAP film, released Nov. 2010; *Meeting with Commander Jalal Bal'aydi al-Murqashi about the Recent Events of the War with the Houthis in Yemen* (Arabic), AQAP film, Nov. 2014; *Your Victory, O' Sunnis*, part one (Arabic), AQAP film, released March 2011; and Sa'id al-Shihri, *Your Victory, O' Sunnis*, AQAP audio message, released January 2011.

(25.) Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'l Jihad/Group of Absolute Monotheism and Struggle (2003–4); al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers (2004–5); the Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin (Mujahidin Consultative Council) umbrella (2006); the Islamic State of Iraq (2006–13); and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (2013–14).

(26.) Al-Zarqawi's recorded messages and writings are full of anti-Shi'i rhetoric and are too numerous to list. Representative messages are 'Has the Story of the *Rafida* (Shi'is) Reached You?' 3 parts (June 2006); and a letter he wrote that was intercepted by the US government in Feb. 2004, available in English translation at <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm>, accessed 20 June 2015. The title of these audio lectures plays off Qur'an 20:9.

(27.) For detailed background information on the career and role within the Islamic State of al-Bin'ali, see Cole Bunzel, 'The Caliphate's Scholar-in-Arms', *Jihadica*, <http://www.jihadica.com/the-caliphate%E2%80%99s-scholar-in-arms/>, accessed 9 July 2014; and Cole Bunzel, 'Bin'ali Leaks: Revelations of the Silent Mufti', *Jihadica*, <http://www.jihadica.com/binali-leaks/>, accessed 15 July 2015.

(28.) ISIL also distributes copies of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's writings in territories it controls as part of its *da'wa* campaign.

(29.) ISIL's public and media discourse is full of anti-Shi'i invective and polemic, with nearly every media release and public declaration including it. What follows is a small representative sample of these materials. These primary sources have been collected and archived. Because of the constant shift of jihadist websites, Twitter accounts and blogs (most of which are quickly shut down, some for good while other re-open relatively quickly), providing active URLs for these sources is difficult since many if not most of the links will be 'dead' by the time of publication. Islamic State films and audio messages (Arabic): *Holocaust of the Safavids in Wilayat Saladin*, parts 1-5, released March-April 2015; *Liquidation of a Safavid Criminal (safawi mujrim)*, released April 2015; *The Rattling of Sabers*, parts 1-4, released July 2012-May 2014; *Breaking the Borders*, released June 2014; *Assault of the Monotheists against the Dens of the Safavids*, released May 2015; *Upon the Prophetic Methodology*, released July 2014; *Punish Them Severely so That Those Who Follow Disperse Fearfully*, parts 1 and 2, released Aug.-Sept. 2014; Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, *So They Kill and are Killed*, released March 2015; Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, *Iraq, Iraq, O' Sunnis*, released Feb. 2012; Wilayat Najd, *Expel the Rafida Polytheists from the Peninsula of the Prophet, peace and prayers be upon him*, released May 2015. Islamic State written publications and statements (Arabic): 'Two Martyrdom-seekers, a German and a Syrian, and Two Car Bombs in Baghdad and Killing Dozens in the Ranks of the Army, Police, and the Volunteers of al-Sistani and the Army of the Antichrist (*Dajjal*)', 19 July 2014; 'Two Martyrdom-seekers from the *Ansar* (Iraqis) in the Heart of Baghdad and Killing and Wounding Nearly 200 Members of the Repressive Government Bodies, the *Rafidi* Mobilization Units, the Army of the *Dajjal*', 12 Oct. 2014; and 'Revenge for Our People in the Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr Mosque in Diyala: A Martyrdom Operation with an Explosive Belt against a Temple (*ma'bad*) used by the Rejectionist Militias (*al-milishiyyat al-rafidiyya*) in the War on Islam and Its People, Killing More Than 100', 25 Aug. 2014.

(30.) Al-Zarqawi, 'Has the Story of the *Rafida* Reached You?' parts 1-3; and Abu Anas al-Shami, *The Shi'a* (Arabic), n.p., n.d.

(31.) Islamic State film, *Destruction of the Idols* (Arabic), released Feb. 2015. Most of these hadith are drawn from the collection of the famous hadith compiler and jurist Ibn Hanbal (d. 855), his *Musnad*; a *musnad* is a hadith collection organised by the name of the Prophetic companion narrating each hadith rather than by topic.

(32.) Islamic State film, *Although the Unbelievers Dislike It* (Arabic and English), released Nov. 2014. Sunnis are described as the 'descendants of Abu Bakr and 'Umar', the first two Rashidun caliphs.

(33.) Ian Black and Dan Roberts, 'Hezbollah is Helping Assad Fight Syria Uprising, says Hassan Nasrallah', *Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/30/hezbollah-syria-uprising-nasrallah>, accessed 30 April 2013; Loveday Morris, 'Hezbollah Chief Defends Group's Involvement in Syrian War', *Washington Post*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/hezbollah-chief-admits-and-defends-groups-involvement-in-syrian-war/2013/05/25/3748965a-c55e-11e2-9fe2-6ee52d0eb7c1_story.html, accessed 25 May 2013; Reuters, 'Top Egypt Cleric Condemns "Sectarian" Foes in Syria', accessed 11 June 2013; Keath, 'Hezbollah Entry in Syria Fans Shiite-Sunni Fires'; Fick, 'Egypt Brotherhood backs Syria Jihad, Denounces Shi'ites'; and Qaradawi.net, 'Al-Qaradawi Calls Upon the Able-bodied to Fight in Syria' (Arabic).

(34.) 'El-Qazzaz: Egypt says Citizens Free to Join Fight in Syria', Arab News Agency, <http://www.anaonline.net/news/default/view/id/133014/lang/en#.Ucdx0l1CL3C>, accessed 14 June 2013; Hamza Hendawi, 'Mursi Pulls Egypt Deeper into Syria Turmoil with Apparent Nod to Jihad', Associated Press, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Jun-18/220718-mursi-pulls-egypt-deeper-into-syria-turmoil-with-apparent-nod-to-jihad.ashx#axzz2X4upLH4G>, accessed 18 June 2013; Aya Batrawy, 'Egypt says Citizens Free to Join Fight in Syria', Associated Press, <http://news.yahoo.com/egypt-says-citizens-free-join-fight-syria-180118807.html>, accessed 13 June 2013; and Matthew Barber, 'Clerics in Egypt Call for Global Jihad against Regime's Shiite Allies, Egypt Cuts Syria Ties', <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/clerics-in-egypt-call-for-global-jihad-against-regimes-shiite-allies/>, accessed 17 June 2013.

(35.) Haykel, 'Al-Qa'ida and Shiism', pp. 186–7.

(36.) Ibid.

(37.) Aron Lund, *Syria's Salafi Insurgents: The Rise of the Syrian Islamic Front*, occasional paper no. 17, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, March 2013; and Aaron Y. Zelin and Charles Lister, 'The Crowning of the Syrian Islamic Front,' *Foreign Policy*, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/06/24/the_crowning_of_the_syrian_islamic_front?wp_login_redirect=0, accessed 24 June 2013.

(38.) Usama al-Rifa'i, 'The *Shaykh* Usama al-Rifa'i, may God protect him, Implores the Free Syrian Army and Cautions against the Safavid Magian Shi'a (*al-Rawafid al-Safawiyin al-Majus*)' (Arabic), video statement, released 22 May 2013, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBzJg6AyFNQ>

(39.) Usama al-Rifa'i, 'Lecture of Shaykh Usama al-Rifa'i on the Topic of the Realities of the Shi'a on Nov. 11, 2014' (Arabic), lecture, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78VSiQot9CA>

(40.) Qays al-Kha'azli, 'Speech Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq,' (Arabic), 5 May 2013, <http://ahlulhaqq.com/index.php/permalink/3322.html>. Al-Khaz'ali is the secretary general of 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, an Iraqi group closely aligned with Iran that fields a powerful paramilitary wing. The group actively targeted US and other coalition forces in Iraq during the occupation of the country and now is one of the main paramilitary groups that make up the Popular Mobilization Units (*al-Hashd al-Sha'bi*), a paramilitary umbrella sanctioned by the Iraqi government.

(41.) Press TV, 'Nasrallah Defends Hezbollah Fighting Extremists in Syrian Town of Qusayr', <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/05/25/305392/nasrallah-backs-fighting-syria-extremists/>, accessed 25 May 2013.

(42.) Alison Meuse, 'Syria's Minorities: Caught between Sword of ISIS and Wrath of Assad', National Public Radio, <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/04/17/400360836/syrias-minorities-caught-between-sword-of-isis-and-wrath-of-assad>, accessed 18 April 2015; Ruth Sherlock, 'Syrian Shias Flee to Lebanon to Escape Sunni Militias', *Daily Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/middleeast/syria/10031492/Syrian-Shias-flee-to-Lebanon-to-escape-Sunni-militias.html>, accessed 1 May 2013; and Patrick J. McDonnell and Nabih Bulos, 'Syria's Shiites Offer Different Picture of War', *Los Angeles Times*, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/26/world/la-fg-0326-syria-shiites-hezbollah-20130326>, accessed 26 March 2013.

(43.) 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq statement, 'The Islamic Resistance, 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, Condemns the Heinous Crime against the Shrine of the Prophet's Companion Hujr bin 'Adi, may God bless him, in Syria' (Arabic), 3 May 2013; AhlulBayt News Agency, 'Senior Shia Cleric 'Seyyed Naser al-Alawi Assassinated in Syria', <http://www.abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&Id=308518>, accessed 14 April 2013; AhlulBayt News Agency, 'Holy Shrine of Hazrat Holiness Sakina (AS)

Damaged by Terrorists in Syria', <http://abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&Id=390320>, accessed 12 Feb. 2013; and Associated Press, 'After Threats to Shrine, Iraqi Shiite Fighters Prepare for Sectarian Strife at Home, in Syria', <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/10/25/after-threats-to-shrine-iraqi-shiite-fighters-prepare-for-sectarian-strife-at/>, accessed 25 Oct. 2012.

(44.) Jafria News, 'Head of Hawza E Zainabia Martyred by Target Killing in Syria', <http://jafrianews.com/2012/04/16/head-of-hawza-e-zainabia-martyred-by-target-killing-in-syria/>, accessed 16 April 2013; and Council of European Jamaats, 'Desecration of Shrine of Hujr bin 'Adi al-Kindi', <http://www.coej.org/secretar-iat/statements/2639-hujr-bin-adi-al-kindi-statement>, accessed 3 May 2013. The last is a statement from the European representative body of Khoja Shi'i Muslims, an affluent and influential sub-group within Twelver Shi'ism.

(45.) See, for example, threads on a popular English-language Shi'i internet discussion board, ShiaChat, such as 'Terrorists Assassinate a Sayyid in Damascus', <http://www.shiachat.com/forum/index.php?topic/235001124-terrorists-assassinatea-sayyid-in-damascus/>, accessed 20 June 2015; and 'Nawasibs Responding to Their Loss in Qusair', <http://www.shiachat.com/forum/index.php?topic/235014497-nawasibs-responding-to-their-loss-in-qusair/>, accessed 20 June 2015. *Nawasib* (singular: *nasibi*) is a derogatory term used by Shi'is to describe critics of Shi'ism who allegedly hate the Prophet Muhammad's family. The term, which appears in Shi'i juridical discourse, appears today frequently in Shi'i polemics against Salafis and other Sunni groups opposed to Shi'ism.

(46.) Paulo G. Pinto, 'Pilgrimage, Commodities, and Religious Objectification: The Making of Transnational Shiism between Iran and Syria', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27:1 (2007): 109–25.

(47.) Edith Szanto Ali-Dib, 'Following Sayyida Zaynab: Twelver Shi'ism in Contemporary Syria' (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2012), pp. 52–3.

(48.) Pinto, 'Pilgrimage, Commodities, and Religious Objectification'.

(49.) Edith Szanto, 'Contesting Fragile Saintly Traditions: Miraculous Healing among Twelver Shi'is in Contemporary Syria', in Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille, eds, *Politics of Worship in the Contemporary Middle East*, Leiden: Brill (2013), pp. 33-52. There is also a major shrine dedicated to Zaynab in Cairo; built by the Fatimids, it is a popular site among Egyptian Sufis who revere and perform rituals to honor the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the Prophet Muhammad's family. See Nadia Abu Zahra, 'Love and Light in the Imagination of al-Sayyida Zaynab's Pilgrims', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, vol. 8 (1988), pp. 118-32; Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, 'Devotion to the Prophet and His Family in Egyptian Sufism', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24:4 (1992): 616-37; and Caroline Williams, 'The Cult of 'Alid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo Part I: The Mosque of al-Aqmar', *Muqarnas*, vol. 1 (1983), pp. 37-52; and 'The Cult of 'Alid Saints in Fatimid Cairo Part II: The Mausolea', *Muqarnas*, vol. 3 (1985), pp. 39-60.

(50.) Szanto Ali-Dib, *Following Sayyida Zaynab*, p. 50; Stephennie Mulder, 'Shi'ites and Shi'ism in Medieval Syria', *Syria Comment*, <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/shi%E2%80%99ites-and-shi%E2%80%99ism-in-medieval-syria-by-stephennie-mulder/>, accessed 19 June 2015; and Stephennie Mulder, *The Shrines of the 'Alids in Medieval Syria*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (2014).

(51.) Lay Shi'is follow a *marja' al-taqlid* (literally 'reference for emulation', a grand jurist/*mujtahid* qualified to deliver juridical opinions) on issues of ritual practice and interpretation of tradition and creed. There is no consensus among Shi'i *maraji'* (plural of *marja'*) as to whether the laity should also follow the political opinions of their *marja'*. See Robert Gleave, 'Conceptions of Authority in Iraqi Shiism: Baqir al-Hakim, Ha'iri and Sistani on Ijtihad, Taqlid, and Marja'iyya', *Theory, Culture and Society* 24: 2 (2007): 59-78. The *maraji'* are frequently referred to by the Shi'i laity and in the news media as 'grand ayatollahs' (singular: *ayatollah al-uzma*).

(52.) Szanto Ali-Dib, *Following Sayyida Zaynab*, p. 56.

(53.) Ibid., pp. 56-62.

(54.) Ibid., p. 56; and Edith Szanto, 'Beyond the Karbala Paradigm: Rethinking Revolution and Redemption in Twelver Shi'a Mourning Rituals', *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 6:1 (2013): 75-91. The Shirazi *maraji'* permit and even encourage the performance of *tatbir*, while Khamenei has prohibited the practice, as has Hizbullah. Its

performance, in addition to symbolically rejecting the religious authority of its critics, also has political implications as regards the competition between the Shirazis and Khamenei over the structure of political authority.

(55.) Christopher Anzalone, 'A Few Notes on Shi'ism in Syria and the Emergence of a Pro-Asad Shi'i Militia, Liwa' Abu'l Fadl al-'Abbas', *Al-Wasat*, <http://thewasat.wordpress.com/2013/05/21/observations-on-shiism-in-syria-and-the-emergence-of-a-pro-asad-shii-militia-liwa-abul-fadl-al-abbas/>, accessed 22 May 2013.

(56.) BBC, *Freedom to Broadcast Hate*, documentary film, released 2013. For background on the al-Anwar television channels, see Rafid Fadhil Ali, 'Religious and the Sectarian Divide in Iraq', in Khalid Hroub, ed., *Religious Broadcasting in the Middle East*, New York: Columbia University Press (2012), pp. 155–71.

(57.) Szanto Ali-Dib, *Following Sayyida Zaynab*, p. 51. For a history of Iraq's shrine cities, see Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (1994).

(58.) Representative videos, all in Arabic, saved in the author's archives and originally uploaded to YouTube and other video-sharing websites include *The Prayer over the Martyrs in the Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, peace be upon her*, released Sept. 2012; *Presentation to the Souls of the Martyrs of Sayyida Zaynab, peace be upon her, and to the Souls of the Martyrs of al-Asad's Syria*, released Sept. 2012; and *Presentation to the Souls of the Martyrs of Sayyida Zaynab*, released Sept. 2012. Many of these videos have since been taken down.

(59.) Suadad al-Salhy, 'Iraqi Shi'ite Militants Fight for Syria's Assad', Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/16/us-syria-crisis-iraq-militias-idUSBRE89F0PX20121016>, accessed 16 Oct. 2012.

(60.) Estimates of the composition of LAFA are based on collected photographs and documents published by the group online and the national and ethnic origins of individual fighters. The Shi'i militias, unlike Sunni militant organisations such as Islamic State and al-Qaeda groups, do not distribute nearly as much media operations material and other literature, nor do they generally produce many polished propaganda films. They do, however, produce and distribute (online as well as on the ground) photographs, recruitment and martyr posters, and short videos seemingly recorded, on cell phones, from their graininess. The visual productions of Shi'i armed groups in Syria and the Hashd al-Sha'bi groups in Iraq are particularly rich. Examples representing only a very small sample are referenced throughout this chapter and are available for viewing online. See Figures 12 and 34 in 'Visual References,' *Views from the Occident*, <http://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>, as well as news media reports, including Russia Today, 'Syria ... National Defense Brigades' Specific Tasks', TV broadcast, 26 March 2013. A number of Afghan Shi'i seminary students expelled by the Iraqi Ba'thist government in the 1970s settled in the *Sayyida Zaynab* district where many of them re-started their studies at the Zaynabiyya Hawza. See Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious Networks in the Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press (2008), p. 196.

(61.) See Figure 1 in 'Visual References,' *Views from the Occident*, <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>; and Jonathan Steele, 'Sunni Tribes Joining Shia Militias as War against IS Heats Up in Iraq', *Middle East Eye*, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sunni-tribes-joining-shia-militias-war-against-heatsiraq-1175770052>, accessed 1 April 2016.

(62.) Mona Alami, 'Iraq's Sunni Fighting Force Still Months Away', *Al-Monitor*, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/iraq-isis-sunnis-anbar-mosultikrit-nouri-maliki.html#>, accessed 1 April 2016; Hamza Hendawi and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, 'Fears in Iraqi Government, Army Over Shiite Militias' Power', Associated Press, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/9696d8589a774c33a2e29aaf9699330c/fears-iraqi-government-army-over-shiite-militias-power>, accessed 1 April 2016; Robin Wright, 'In War against ISIS, Numbers Don't Always Tell the Story', *Wall Street Journal*, <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2015/03/13/in-war-againstisis-numbers-dont-always-tell-the-story/>, accessed 1 April 2016; and Mustafa Saadoun, 'It's Official: Sunnis Joining Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units', *Al-Monitor*, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/iraq-isis-sunnis-anbar-mosultikrit-nouri-maliki.html#>, accessed 1 April 2016.

monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/iraq-sunnisjoin-shiite-popular-mobilization-forces.html#, accessed 1 April 2016.

(63.) For various estimates, see Richard Barrett, *Foreign Fighters in Syria*, occasional paper, Soufan Group, June 2014; and Aron Lund, 'Who are the Foreign Fighters in Syria? An Interview with Aaron Y. Zelin', blog post, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=53811>, accessed 5 Dec. 2013.

(64.) Associated Press, 'After Threats to Shrine, Iraqi Shiite Fighters Prepare for Sectarian Strife at Home, in Syria', <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/10/25/after-threats-to-shrine-iraqi-shiite-fighters-prepare-for-sectarian-strife-at/>, accessed 25 Oct. 2012; al-Salhy, 'Iraqi Shi'ite Militants Fight for Syria's Assad'; Yasir Ghazi and Tim Arango, 'Iraqi Sects Join Battle in Syria on Both Sides', *New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/world/middleeast/influx-of-iraqi-shiites-to-syria-widens-wars-scope.html?_r=0, accessed 27 Oct. 2012; and Russia Today, TV broadcast, 26 March 2013.

(65.) Nicholas Blanford, 'Hezbollah Ready for Qalamoun Offensive', *Daily Star*, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Mar-20/291498-hezbollah-readying-for-qalamoun-offensive.ashx>, accessed 20 March 2015; Nour Samaha, 'Why Qalamoun Matters for Hezbollah', Al-Jazeera English online, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/150511085809867.html>, accessed 11 May 2015; Daily Star, 'Hezbollah, Syrian Army Destroyed 40 Militant Bases, 4 Operation Rooms in Qalamoun Offensive', <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/May-19/298593-hezbollah-syrian-army-destroyed-40-militant-bases-4-operations-rooms-in-qalamoun-offensive.ashx>, accessed 19 May 2015; and Daily Star, 'Hezbollah Takes More Qalamoun Highlands from Nusra; Jihadis Clash Nearby', <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/May-25/299227-hezbollah-takes-more-qalamoun-highlands-from-nusra-jihadis.ashx>, accessed 25 May 2015.

(66.) Associated Press, 'After Threats to Shrine, Iraqi Shiite Fighters Prepare for Sectarian Strife at Home, in Syria'. Representative early statements, all in Arabic, include Kata'ib Hizbullah (Brigades of the Party of God), 'Statement: The Martyr, Ahmad Mahdi al-Shuwayli', 15 April 2013; and Kata'ib Hizbullah, 'Rida Khudayr al-Khalidi, 6 May 2013, and a representative video in which the group affiliations of Shi'i fighters killed in Syria are listed is 'Martyrs of *Liwa' Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas*' (Arabic), released June 2013. The group affiliations listed include the Sadr Movement, 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq (League of the

Righteous), and Kata'ib Hezbollah. The video also purports to show martyred fighters from two other militias, the Liwa' Jund Allah (Brigade of God's Soldiers) and Liwa' Quwat Haydar (Brigade of the Force of Haydar), using an honorific meaning 'lion' in Arabic used by Shi'is for the first Imam, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. See also Figures 13–15 in 'Visual References', <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>. The martyr posters and artwork produced by Iran and the Iraqi political parties and paramilitary organisations both within the Hashd umbrella and outside it are quite similar to the output of the militias in Syria. See Figures 54–61 in 'Visual References', <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>

(67.) See Figures 16–18 in 'Visual References', <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>

(68.) Russia Today, 'News Report: Formation of a Shi'ite Brigade composed of Iraqis and Lebanese for Defending the Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab South of Damascus', <http://arabic.rt.com/news/609264>, accessed 4 March 2013. See also Figures 2–6 and 37–39 in 'Visual References', <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>; and a militia video, *Clashes of the Al-Qasim Brigade of Liwa' Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas* (Arabic), April 2013.

(69.) Ibid. and Figure 1 in 'Visual References', <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>

(70.) Al-Nahar, 'Exhumation of the Grave of Hujr bin 'Adi and Hezbollah: It was a Terrorist Crime', <http://www.annahar.com/article/31061>, accessed 2 May 2013; Ramin Mostaghim and Patrick J. McDonnell, 'Iranians Protest Desecration of Syrian Shrine', *Los Angeles Times*, <http://www.latimes.com/news/world/world-now/la-fg-wn-iran-protest-syria-shrine-desecration-20130510,0,4871059.story>, accessed 10 May 2013; and AhlulBayt News Agency, 'Holy Shrine of Hazrat Sakina (AS) Damaged by Terrorists in Syria', <http://abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&Id=390320>, accessed 12 Feb. 2013.

(71.) See Figure 10 in 'Visual References', <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>

(72.) See Figure 11 in 'Visual References', <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>

(73.) I do not mean that the months of importance to all Muslims, such as Ramadan, are not central also to the Shi'i religious calendar,

but that 'Ashura and 'Arba'in are the centres of the distinctly Shi'i Islamic lunar year and annual ritual practice.

(74.) See Figures 24–27 and 40–44 in 'Visual References', <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>

(75.) Referring here specifically to the family line revered by Shi'is.

(76.) See Figures 31–33 in 'Visual References', <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>

(77.) The Karbala tragedy is re-enacted annually in passion plays (*ta'ziyat*) and gatherings in Shi'i mosques and centres in which the events leading up to the battle, the battle and its aftermath are recalled and discussed. The mourning rituals for Husayn and his party vary from locale to locale and from community to community. For details, see Peter Chelkowski, ed., *Eternal Performance: Taziye and Other Shiite Rituals*, Chicago: Seagull Books/University of Chicago Press (2010).

(78.) For English translations of her orations, see Mehdi Jaferey, *The Orations of Hazrat Zainab after Kerbela*, Karachi: Ishtiaq Ahmed Romi (1960).

(79.) Abir Hamdar, 'Jihad of Words: Gender and Contemporary Karbala Narratives', *The Yearbook of English Studies* vol. 39, no. 1/2 (2009): 90–96; Rachel Kantz Feder, 'Fatima's Revolutionary Image in *Fadak fi al-Tarikh* (1955): The Inception of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's Activism', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 41, no. 1 (2014): 79–96; Edith Szanto, 'Sayyida Zaynab in the State of Exception: Shi'i Sainthood as "Qualified Life," in Contemporary Syria', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* vol. 44 (2012): 286; Lara Deeb, 'Emulating and/or Embodying the Ideal: The Gendering of Temporal Frameworks and Islamic Role Models in Shi'i Lebanon', *American Ethnologist* vol. 36, no. 2 (2009): 252–3; and David Pinault, 'Zaynab bint 'Ali and the Place of the Women of the Households of the First Imams in Shi 'ite Devotional Literature', in Gavin R. G. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, New York: St Martin's Press (2008), pp. 73, 83–94.

(80.) Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2006), p. 96.

(81.) See Figures 7 and 8, 20–23 and 28–30 in ‘Visual References’, <https://occident-blog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>; and videos, all in Arabic, *O’ Zaynab: Operations of Liwa’ Abu al-Fadl al-‘Abbas, designated to Protect the Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, peace be upon her*, released December 2012; and Baraq al-Khaqani and ‘Ali Abu Kiyan al-Muwali, ‘Ya Zaynab’, *nashid*; the music video is viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHcEiDjmDss>, accessed 20 June 2015.

(82.) For Abu Sakkar’s reported cannibalism, see Drishya Nair, ‘Syria’s Cannibal Commander Abu Sakkar: Why I Ate My Enemy’s Heart’, *International Business Times*, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/articles/467780/20130515/syria-rebel-abu-sakkar-bites-heart-interview.htm>, accessed 15 May 2013. See Figure 35 in ‘Visual References’, <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>; the image of Hind kneeling over the fallen Hamza is taken from the late director Moustapha Akkad’s classic 1976 film *The Message* about the Prophet Muhammad and the origins of Islam. According to Islamic historical writings, Hind later converted to Islam after the fall of Mecca to the Muslims in 630 CE, was forgiven by the Prophet Muhammad, and is today considered one of the many of the revered ‘companions’ (*Sahaba*) of the Prophet.

(83.) Sayyid Najmulhasan Karrarvi, *Biography of Hazrat Abbas*, Karachi: Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust (1974), pp. 49–51 and 78–90; and *Karbala: When the Skies Wept Blood*, film, viewable at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIQQ_ODKMWE, accessed 19 June 2015.

(84.) Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi’is of Iraq*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (1994), p. 45.

(85.) See Figures 14 and 48–53 in ‘Visual References’, *Views from the Occident*, <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>

(86.) See Figures 48–53 and in ‘Visual References’, *Views from the Occident*, <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>

(87.) <http://www.kt-im-ali.com/>, accessed 19 June 2015.

(88.) <http://saidshuhada.com/>, accessed 19 June 2015.

(89.) Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, p. 47.

(90.) The tragic story of al-Qasim's battlefield marriage was likely first included in the sixteenth-century, Persian-language elegiac martyrology of Husayn Va'iz Kashifi, *Garden of the Martyrs*. See Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, p. 28; and David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India*, New York: Palgrave (2001), p. 68. It has been published numerous times in various languages. See Husayn Va'iz Kashifi, *Garden of the Martyrs*, Qum: Daftar-i Nashr-i Navid-i Islam (2000).

(91.) Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*, pp. 66–7.

(92.) *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 17: *The First Civil War*, trans. by G. R. Hawting, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press (1996), pp. 145–6.

(93.) Myriam Ababsa, 'Les mausolées invisibles: Raqqa, ville de pèlerinage chiite ou pôle étatique en Jazîra syrienne', *Annales de Géographie* 622 (2001): 647–64; and 'Significations territoriales et appropriations conflictuelles des mausolées chiites de Raqqa (Syrie)', in *Les pèlerinages au Maghreb et au Moyen-Orient: Espaces Public, Espaces du Public* (Pilgrimages to the Maghreb and Middle East: Public Spaces and Spaces of the Public), Damascus: Presses de l'Ifpo (2010).

(94.) Myriam Ababsa, 'The Shi'i Mausoleums of Raqqa: Iranian Proselytism and Local Significations', in Fred H. Larson, ed., *Demystifying Syria*, London: Saqi (2009), pp. 85–104.

(95.) Ibid., p. 89; and Pinto, 'Pilgrimage, Commodities, and Religious Objectification'.

(96.) Ababsa, 'The Shi'i Mausoleums of Raqqa', p. 92.

(97.) Ibid., pp. 99–100.

(98.) I differentiate here between the movement led by Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr's son, Muqtada, and a broader set of groups who base their legitimacy in large part on their supposed connection to the late ayatollah, referring here to the latter.

(99.) Sadiq al-Sadr's cousin, the famous Iraqi Shi'i *mujtahid* and intellectual Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (1935–80), who was tortured and executed by the Iraqi government, is known as 'the first martyr al-Sadr' (*al-shahid al-Sadr al-awwal*).

(100.) This change in name was not official but the collective decision of the district's residents, who began to call it Sadr City soon after the toppling of Saddam's regime in April 2003.

(101.) Centres where rituals to commemorate the *Ahl al-Bayt* are held.

(102.) Juan Cole, 'The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba'thist Iraq', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 57, no. 4 (2003): 543–66.

(103.) Justin Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism*, New York: Cambridge University Press (2012), particularly ch. 5.

(104.) For background on 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, see Sam Wyer, *The Resurgence of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq*, Middle East Security Report no. 7, Institute for the Study of War, Dec. 2012, <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ResurgenceofAAH.pdf>, accessed 21 June 2015.

(105.) A representative view is that of Husayn al-Qazwini in a lecture entitled 'Analysis of Sistani's Fetwa [sic] on Jihad' during the month of Ramadan in 2014 (1435 *hijri*), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tn2NsnCBgbc>, accessed 19 June 2015. Note the focus solely on the targeting and persecution of Shi'is and the essential neglect of the many non-Shi'is who were also killed during the Arab uprisings. Al-Qazwini describes the wave of protests and uprisings as the 'Arab Winter' and portrays the Syrian opposition as being largely foreign, though he focuses almost entirely on the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra.

(106.) Muhammad al-Jaburi, (official) *Biography of the Marja' Qasim al-Ta'i, may God protect his shadow* (Arabic).

(107.) 'Advice to the Mujahidin who are Defending the Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, during the Pilgrimage (*ziyarat*) to the Shrine' (Arabic), released May 2013; 'Word of His Eminence, Shaykh al-Ta'i, during His Reception of a Group of Mujahidin' (Arabic), released June 2013; 'The Mujahid Shaykh Qasim al-Ta'i at the Blessed Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab' (Arabic), released April 2013; and 'Shaykh Qasim al-Ta'i Opens an Office in Syria, Sayyida Zaynab' (Arabic), video, released Dec. 2012. See also Figures 45–47 in 'Visual References', *Views from the Occident*, <https://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/>

(108.) 'Shaykh al-Ta'i's presents a Eulogistic Ceremony for the Martyrs of Zaynab, peace be upon her' (Arabic), released April 2013; 'Letter of His Eminence Shaykh al-Ta'i to the Leader of Liwa' Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas, *Sayyid* Muhammad al-'Askari' (Arabic), released April 2013; Liwa' Zulficar (Brigade of Zulficar), 'Statement from the Leadership of Liwa' Zulficar Defending the Holy Shrines in Beloved Syria' (Arabic), 16 June 2013.

(109.) Kazim al-Ha'iri, *fatwa* (Arabic), 18 Nov. 2013 (14 *Muharram* 1435 *hijri*); and *fatwa* (Arabic), 25 May 2013 (14 *Rajab* 1434 *hijri*).

(110.) The questioner, however, does specifically ask about them.

(111.) Al-Ha'iri, *fatwa*, 25 May 2013.

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(114.) Jeremy Bowen, 'The Fearsome Iraqi Militias Vowing to Vanquish ISIS', BBC News, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28199741>, accessed 7 July 2014.

(115.) Babak Dehghanpisheh, 'The Fighters of Iraq who Answer to Iran', Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-militias-specialreport-idUSKCN0I-W0ZA20141112>, accessed 12 Nov. 2014; Matthew Hilburn, 'One-time US Prisoner Now Key in Battling IS', *Voice of America*, <http://www.voanews.com/content/qais-khazali-onetime-us-prisoner-now-key-in-battling-islamic-state/2679431.html>, accessed 16 March 2015; and Mohammed al-Zaidi, 'Interview with

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